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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**June 2010**  
***The Tantra Way – II***

**Vol. 115, No. 6**

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *MOTHER WORSHIP*



**I**T is my belief that the Tantras, in vogue amongst us, were the creation of the Buddhists themselves. Those Tantrika rites are even more dreadful than our doctrine of Vamachara; for in them adultery got a free rein, and it was only when the Buddhists became demoralised through immorality that they were driven away by Kumarila Bhatta. As some Sannyasins speak of Shankara, or the Bauls of Shri Chaitanya, that he was in secret an epicure, a drunkard, and one addicted to all sorts of abominable practices—so the modern Tantrika Buddhists speak of the Lord Buddha as a dire Vamachari and give an obscene interpretation to the many beautiful precepts of the Prajnaparamita, such as the Tattvagatha and the like.

The real meaning of the word Tantra is Shastra, as for example, Kapila Tantra. But the word Tantra is generally used in a limited sense. Under the sway of kings who took up Buddhism and preached broadcast the doctrine of Ahimsa, the performances of the Vedic Yaga-yajnas became a thing of the past, and no one could kill any animal in sacrifice for fear of the king. But subsequently amongst the Buddhists themselves—who were converts from Hinduism—the best parts of these Yaga-yajnas were taken up, and practised in secret. From these sprang up the Tantras. Barring some of

the abominable things in the Tantras, such as the Vamachara etc., the Tantras are not so bad as people are inclined to think. There are many high and sublime Vedantic thoughts in them. In fact, the Brahmana portions of the Vedas were modified a little and incorporated into the body of the Tantras. All the forms of our worship and the ceremonials of the present day, comprising the Karma Kanda, are observed in accordance with the Tantras.

It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings. You always criticise the women, but say what have you done for their uplift? Writing down Smritis etc., and binding them by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines! If you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise. ... Without propitiating the Mother by worship and obeisance, not even Brahma and Vishnu have the power to elude Her grasp and attain to freedom.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
1.232, 1.239, 7.46.



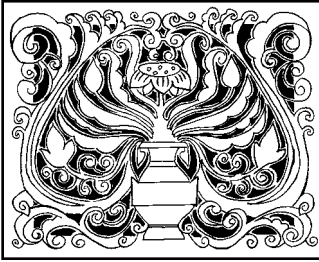
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Vol. 115, No. 6  
June 2010

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Amrita Kalasha

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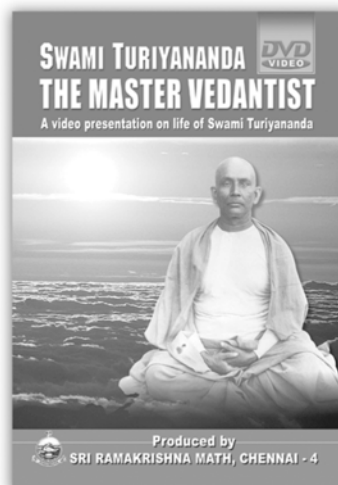
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## ***Understanding the Mother***

June 2010  
Vol. 115, No. 6

Who is there that can understand  
    what Mother Kali is?  
Even the six darshanas  
    are powerless to reveal her.  
It is she, the scriptures say,  
    that is the inner Self  
Of the yogi, who in Self  
    discovers all his joy;  
She that, of her own sweet will,  
    inhabits every living thing.

The macrocosm and microcosm  
    rest in the Mother's womb;  
Now, do you see how vast it is?  
    In the Muladhara  
The yogi meditates on her,  
    and in the Sahasrara:  
Who but Shiva has beheld her  
    as she really is?  
Within the lotus wilderness she sports  
    beside her mate, the Swan.

When man aspires to understand her,  
    Ramprasad must smile;  
To think of knowing her, he says,  
    is quite as laughable  
As to imagine one swimming  
    across the boundless sea.  
But while my mind has understood,  
    alas! My heart has not;  
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive  
    to make a captive of the moon.

(Ramprasad)

# THIS MONTH

The essence of the tantra way lies not so much in the use of specific techniques as in the ability to harness power and channel it to suitable ends. **Embodying Shakti** is the crux of Shakti worship—we need to remember this as we survey the tantras.

Sri Ramakrishna has been widely recognized as the foremost among modern practitioners of the tantras whose methods and experiences shed fresh light on obscure techniques as well as the means to success in tantric sadhana. Swami Ishatmananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Narottamnagar, explicates some of these issues in **Shakti Puja and Sri Ramakrishna**.



**Tantra: Its Origin, Nature, and Contents** remain shrouded in mystery even today. Prof. Debabrata Sen Sharma, Professor of Indology, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, sheds light on some of the obscure aspects of the tantras.

Mother Kali is one of the central deities of the tantric pantheon, and the details of her conception and worship highlight important aspects of tantric esotericism. Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, a tantric scholar of repute from Varanasi, provides us with a glimpse into the world of Mother Kali in **Tantra and Kali: Some Reflections**.



Songs are a powerful means of invoking the Goddess and expressing the experiences that the tantric sadhaka undergoes. Sri Srinjay Chakravarti, Content Editor, Mergermarket Group, brings the world of tantric devotional outpourings alive in **The Crimson Hibiscus: Songs for the Divine Mother**.

**Swami Abhedananda: An Outstanding Personality** is Prof. Haridas Mukherjee's tribute to a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna whom he sees as a philosopher and a patriot. The author is former Head, Department of History, Presidency College, Kolkata.

**Swami Jagadananda at Vrindaban** is a vivid portrait of the last days of a monk who embodied the ideals of jnana and bhakti. The author, Swami Dhyanananda, was Joint Editor, *Udbodhan*.



Sri A P N Pankaj continues his elucidation of the **The Poetic Philosophy of Ramcharitmanas** with a study of its opening invocatory verse. The author is a littérateur of repute from Chandigarh.



Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, concludes his commentary on the prerequisites for the study of Vedanta in the fourth instalment of **Vedanta-sara**.

**Mahendranath Gupta: From Death to Immortality** is a valuable account of the last days of the famous disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The author, Swami Chetanananda, is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.

# Embodying Shakti

ON 6 May 1897 Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to the Mahakali Pathshala, a school for young girls founded by Tapaswini Mataji Gangabai in Calcutta. There, 'at a word from Mataji all of them [students] commenced reciting the Sanskrit meditation of Lord Shiva with proper intonation. Then they demonstrated at the instance of the Mother how they were taught the ceremonies of worship in their school. ... After this, Mataji sent for some particular girl and asked her to explain before Swamiji the first verse of the third canto of Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsham*, which she did in Sanskrit.'

Born in 1835 of Maharashtrian parents at Vellore in the Arcot district of present Tamil Nadu, where her father was the ruler of a tiny state, Gangabai became well versed 'in Sanskrit religious literature as well as skilled in riding, sword-play, and all manly games' at an early age. 'Hearing the call of God and the motherland she left her home and, after many adventures, came to Jhansi, and became an intimate companion of Rani Lakshmi Bai, who was a distant maternal aunt of hers. Along with her she plunged into the conflagration of 1857, and fought bravely in her army on horseback, sword and lance in hand. After Lakshmi Bai's death, she fled to Nepal, in the company of Nana Saheb, and spent the life of a fugitive there for nearly thirty years, practising the hardest sadhanas, which probably gave her the name Tapaswini Mata, and preparing for her next mission in life, which was carried out in Calcutta.' She is reported to have arrived in Calcutta around 1890 and founded her school in 1893. Over the next ten years the institution expanded to twenty-three branches with four hundred and fifty students, a remarkable achievement for the times. As Swamiji expressed his great appreciation at the

success Tapaswini Mataji had attained in educating girls in a traditional society, she replied with characteristic humility, 'In my service to my students, I look upon them as the Divine Mother; ... in starting the school I have neither fame nor any other object in view.' Therein lay, probably, the secret of Mataji's success.

At this very time Sri Ramakrishna's disciple Gauri-ma was also engaged in an important educational programme. Not only had Gauri-ma trained herself in scriptural studies, she also undertook extensive itinerant tapasya. Sri Ramakrishna, however, commissioned her to work for the women of India. 'You have practised enough spiritual disciplines,' he said. 'Now you should serve the women with your spiritual energy.'

In 1895 Gauri-ma founded the Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama for women at Barrackpur. She transferred the ashrama to North Calcutta in 1911; fifty dedicated women joined the ashrama, and three hundred girls received their education there. Once, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Calcutta she met him at Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's residence and 'spoke to him about *nishkama karma* (unselfish action) according to the Bhagavadgita, and mentioned the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for the present age, "Serve man as God"'. That Gauri-ma's work exemplified this ideal is attested to by Sri Sarada Devi: 'Gaur-dasi takes wonderful care of the girls at her ashrama. If anyone is ill, she does all her personal services herself.'

One day, when Gauri-ma was visiting Belur Math, a monk asked her: 'We heard that when you left home you were a young girl. Weren't you afraid to travel by yourself—and without any money?' Gauri-ma replied: 'My son, all fear is pertaining to the body. I had something with me so that no one

could harm me.' Gauri-ma had clearly ascended rare heights very early in her spiritual journey.

Tapaswini Mata's aunt, Rani Lakshmibai, also manifested the Devi, albeit in battle. Swami Vivekananda observed: 'During the Mutiny of 1857, [Rani Lakshmibai] fought against the English soldiers and held her own ground for two years—leading modern armies, managing batteries and always charging at the head of her army. ... A man whom I know lost three of his sons in that war. When he talks of them he is calm, but when he talks of this woman his voice becomes animated. He used to say that she was a goddess—she was not a human being. This old veteran thinks he never saw better generalship.'

Rani Rasmani, a contemporary of Lakshmibai, was equally well known for her generosity, courage, and piety. Though born in a poor family, the pet name 'Rani' given by her mother became her popular title 'in recognition of her royally benevolent and commanding nature.' According to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Rani Rasmani was one of the eight *nayikas* [attendant goddesses] of the Divine Mother. She came down to the world to spread the worship of the Divine Mother.' Though she is best remembered for the Dakshineswar Kali temple that she founded, numerous public works—roads, ghats, ponds—relief activities, and charity testify to the Devi manifest in her life.

In her piety and munificence Rani Rasmani was only following in the footsteps of Rani Ahalyabai Holkar and Bhavani, whose spirituality and beneficent reign in the eighteenth century have remained legendary. 'Bhavani's life was a pattern of disciplined activity. ... From the early hours of dawn till late morning she would be occupied with her daily religious observances. Then she would cook meals for ten brahmanas and feed them, and when she took her own breakfast, it would be long past mid-day. Next she would come to the office and give the necessary orders verbally. Her evenings were passed in listening to recitals from the Puranas. Then her manager would come for her signature to written orders, charters, grants and important communications. This was followed by a visit to the bank

of the river, where she would set adrift an earthen lamp burning ghee. She would return home, take some light refreshments and again come to office. This was the time when her tenants and visitors would meet her with their prayers and grievances. The audience was usually over by about ten o'clock, and then she would retire for the night, but not before she had inquired about the welfare of the members of her household.' Ahalyabai too had a very similar routine.

Both Bhavani and Ahalyabai continue to be remembered for their exceptional charities and public works, and Varanasi happens to be one pilgrimage centre where their bounty found a particularly liberal expression. Both spent generously on the construction and renovation of temples, opening and running rest houses and *satras*, almonries, digging tanks, wells, and ponds, building ghats, and undertaking numerous other religious and charitable works. Bhavani was 'so renowned for her charity and piety and was so much loved and respected by the local people of Varanasi that she was popularly called the "Annapurna of Kashi".'

Bhavani's adopted son Raja Ramakrishna also became famous as a great devotee of Mother Kali. Though he inherited his mother's largesse, he remained too immersed in his tantric devotions to administer the large estate he inherited. As big sections of the property were auctioned owing to Raja Ramakrishna's inability to manage them, Bhavani had only blessings for him: 'May you be like the scions of the solar dynasty.'

The kings of the solar dynasty were known for their spirit of service and their detachment. Swami Saradananda observes in *Bharate Shaktipuja*: 'Whatever be the purpose, to attain success in Shakti worship one must avoid unnecessary loss of energy, unite with the Atman within—the source of all energy—keep the channels for the flow of power therefrom clear, and then with due faith evoke the grace of the great Shakti through proper invocation, worship, and self-sacrifice.' This then is the key to success in tantric sadhana. The remarkable lives noted here only go to reiterate this secret.



# Shakti Puja and Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Ishatmananda

‘**Y**EH KYA DAIVI MAYA; what divine miracle is this!’—these words remind us of a wonderful incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna: It was midnight. A heavily built sannyasin with matted locks was standing in the middle of the Ganga somewhere between Baranagar and Dakshineswar. Though in the middle of this mighty river, he could not find sufficient water to submerge his frame. This sannyasin was Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna’s Vedantic preceptor, who had stepped into the river to end his life and get relief from unbearable bodily pain. All of a sudden, the Ganga was merely knee-deep and he could not drown himself. Awestruck, Totapuri cried: ‘*Yeh kya daivi maya.*’<sup>1</sup> How could this happen? The one responsible for this miracle was standing on the bank of the Ganga at Dakshineswar. He was overjoyed at having convinced his illumined master about the existence of Shakti, of Kali.

One who was ‘Mother’ to Sri Ramakrishna is the ‘Shakti’ of the scriptures. The philosophy of Shakti is known as tantra. The word ‘tantra’ brings mixed feelings into our minds. We become doubtful and feel uneasy about its efficacy as a spiritual practice. Many in India and abroad still consider tantra and black magic to be synonymous. This ancient and great philosophical knowledge was misinterpreted and misused by the opponents of the tantra system. Their false propaganda placed tantra on a par with the activities of ghosts, spirits, and demons. Through his unique sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna revived and re-established the spiritual discipline of tantra, and through his worship, he transformed the all-powerful Goddess into the compassionate Mother.

## What Is Tantra?

The word ‘tantra’ is derived from the root *tanu*, which means ‘expansion’: ‘*Tanyate vistaryate jnanam anena*

*iti tantram*; it is called tantra as knowledge is spread by it.’ What kind of knowledge is referred to here? The true knowledge of Ishvara. Knowledge of the identity and inseparability of Shiva and the primal Energy—termed Prakriti, Kali, and the like—is the true knowledge of Ishvara. In tantra this realization is called mukti or nirvana. Tantra elevates the aspirant from the plane of duality to the non-dual plane.

With the propagation of Shaivism and Pancharatra doctrines, tantra came to be increasingly recognized both as scripture and as spiritual discipline. The majority of tantric scriptures have been lost; what remains is largely in the form of fragmentary texts. Tantra effectively explains the mystery of creation. The great oriental scholar R G Bhandarkar is of the opinion that tantra is a mystical philosophy, an esoteric spiritual practice that can be undertaken only by a person of self-control.

One of the earliest mentions of the terms ‘Shaiva’ and ‘Pancharatra’ are found in the Naradiya section of the ‘Shanti Parva’ of the Mahabharata, where the great devotee Shiva Srikantha is said to have propounded the spiritual doctrine of Pashupata—the oldest theory of tantra in North India. Also called ‘Agama’, it is considered the source of tantric performances of Vedic origin like *homa* and *abhisheka*. According to different schools, the Agamas vary from eighteen to twenty-eight in number. The Yamalas are another important set of tantric texts. There are eight popular Yamalas attributed to Rudra, Skanda, Brahma, Vishnu, Yama, Vayu, Kubera, and Indra.<sup>2</sup>

In the Shaiva tantra, Rudra or Sadashiva is the predominant spokesperson, but in the Yamalas, Bhairava is the principal figure and a teacher of humans. There are three *śrotas*, streams, of sadhana in the Yamala tradition: Dakshina, Vama, and Madhyama. In the Agamas we find two *śrotas*: one of

Shiva Pashupati worship, the aim of which is mukti or liberation; and the other of Shakti worship, the aim of which is acquisition of supernatural power.

When it spread to Tibet, Buddhism created a special form of tantra called Mantrayana. It has three parts: Vajrayana, Sahajayana, and Kalachakrayana. Its practices are based on mantras, *mudras*, and mandalas and aim at awakening Shakti, which they call 'Prajna'. In the tenth and eleventh centuries Buddhist tantra got diluted and mingling with other tantra schools gave rise to the later Hindu tantras. The more organized form of this school is reflected in the *Sammohana Tantra*, which is an admixture of various forms of tantra: Vidyapitha, Shaktipitha, Shaivapitha, Ganeshpitha, Chandrapitha, Buddhapitha, Chinapitha, and Vaidikapitha.

The *Sammohana Tantra* brought together different mantras and spiritual disciplines of Kali worship. We find mention of nine forms of Kali: Shankara-kashani, Siddha-kali, Kubjika, Sundari, Mahakhila-devi, Srimat-siddha-karalika, Pratyangira, Sheshika, and Snehamata. *Sammohana Tantra* also enumerates three forms of spiritual discipline: Divya, Kaula, and Vama.

Matsyendranath is considered the propounder of the Kaula path, the followers of which are also called the Yogini Kaulas of Kamarupa. They worship Shakti alone and have adopted many practices of the Sahajiya school of tantra. Both the Yogini Kaulas and Buddhist Sahajiya tantrics had the same goal: to transcend duality by concentrating the mind. The Kaulas gave rise to two more sects: the Shaiva sect of the Naths and the Vaishnava Sahajiya sect. Matsyendranath, the founder of the Nath community, is also known as Lui-pada in Buddhist tantra. The other popular teachers of this sect are Minanath and Gorakshanath. This sect spread far and wide in India. Hatha Yoga forms their principal practice.

The Vaishnava Sahajiya tantra was in vogue before the advent of Sri Chaitanya. In this school, initiated by Chandidas, Sri Krishna takes the place of Kali. Chandidas explains this discipline in his *Sri Krishna Kirtan*. Srimati Radha is considered Shakti by this school, and Sri Krishna is looked upon as Brahman. The Vaishnava tantra drew many ideas from other Hindu tantras and the Buddhist Sahajiya tantra. The followers of Vaishnava Sahajiya tantra concentrate on *nadis*, energy channels, and chakras, foci of energy, in the body. The highest chakra is the full-bloomed lotus in the head called Sahasrara. The Buddhist Sahajiya tantra speaks of five Shaktis: Dombi, Nati, Rajaki, Chandali, and Brahmakali. Of these, Chandidas made Rajaki his object of worship. The Vaishnava Sahajiya tantra further gave rise to two sects: Avadhuta and Baul.

Indian tantra spread across frontiers all round the world and also assimilated the tantric ideologies of other countries. The *Sammohana Tantra* was transmitted to Nepal, Bhutan, China, Persia, and Afghanistan. There is a tantra school called Chinachara indicating the assimilation of Chinese practices into Indian tantric tradition. However, it is very difficult to single out these foreign influences. It is said that the sage Vasishtha practised tantra for a long time in China and then preached it in India. Mahachina Tara, the goddess of Chinese tantra, and Ekajata,

the goddess of Siddha Nagarjuna of Tibet, are considered to be the same. Both deities have the same description, only their mantras differ. The names of Tara, Ugratara, Ekajata, Maha-nila-saraswati also find mention in Hindu tantra scriptures.

According to the *Sammohana Tantra*, Nila-saraswati or Ugratara was born on the bank of Lake Kola on Mount Meru. 'Kul' means lake in Mongolian. It is also believed to be the origin of the word 'Kaula'. Scholars like Gopinath Kaviraj believe that

Ekajata Devi





tantra scriptures and practices are exclusively Indian traditions.<sup>3</sup> Swami Saradananda also holds the same view: 'Shakti puja, especially the worship of Shakti as Mother is the exclusive heritage of India.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Vedanta and Tantra**

Some questions crop up in our minds: Why are there so many spiritual disciplines if all of them lead to the same goal? Which was propounded first: Vedanta or tantra? Among them, which is better? While there seems to be very little criticism of Vedanta, why is tantra widely criticized?

In answer to the first question we may say that this is distinctive of the Indian spiritual tradition. Every human being has the right to choose his or her spiritual path. There may be many paths to reach God, but there is little violence or bloodshed among the different schools. Let there be 'as many sects as human beings',<sup>5</sup> Swami Vivekananda said; and also: 'sects must be, but sectarianism need not' (3,371). This breadth and catholicity is the uniqueness of the Indian way.

In response to the second question we may quote Gopinath Kaviraj: 'It is difficult to tell how old the practice of tantra in India is. However, it is certain that both Vedic and tantric sadhana are prevalent in this country since ancient times. ... It is evident from the analysis of the *Nirukta* (of Yaska) that an esoteric path of the Vedas was in vogue in ancient times, the practice of which was reserved for those having the special permission of the guru.'<sup>6</sup>

This esoteric path of the Vedas could be said to be tantra. Tantra is known as *shruti-shakha-vishesha*, a special branch of the Vedas. It is also called the fifth Veda as well as Kulachara, the fifth ashrama. The *Kularnava Tantra* holds that there is no knowledge higher than the Vedas and there is no path better than the tantra. The Vedas and tantra are not contradictory, rather they are complementary. That answers the third question.

The fourth question is particularly significant. Apart from the practices of discernment and contemplation, the Vedas also prescribed sacrifices. The correct pronunciation of mystical words and

the accurate performance of rituals were believed to bring welfare. Mantras are imbued with great power, which can be used both for good and bad purposes. Nature can be controlled by the power of mantras. There are many instances of great personalities using this power for the good of people.

In the Ramayana we find Mahavira Hanuman making his body as small as that of a fly and again expanding it to the size of a huge mountain. In the Mahabharata the sage Vyasa says to River Yamuna, 'Divide yourself', and Yamuna parts herself and paves the way for Vyasa. Sri Krishna uprooted a whole mountain and held it on his index finger, and thus came to be known as Giridhara. Jesus Christ walked on water and fed multitudes from a little piece of bread. Readers of the biography of Sri Ramakrishna are aware of his miraculous simultaneous presence in Dhaka and Dakshineswar. He could also see through the human mind as clearly as one sees through glass.

Acquiring supernatural power through mantras is said to be easier than steadfastly holding on to the goal of spiritual life: God-realization or Self-knowledge. The practices of tantra are coeval with those of Vedanta. Tantra aims at realizing the identity of Shiva and Shakti. However, as Swami Saradananda writes:

Is it easy for the human mind, so full of worldly desires, to move towards the path of renunciation? Can a person call on God without any motive and with sincerity proceed to attain Him? In the pursuit of a pure life, one wilfully keeps some impure desires; even after renouncing lust and gold, a person loves to have a little taste of them. The books of worship enjoin worshipping the Divine Mother with austerity and purity of heart, but there are some people who prescribe singing a few lustful songs for Her satisfaction. One should not wonder at this or condemn it. It proves that weak human beings are strongly bound with the chain of lust and gold by the all-powerful Mahamaya, ruler of myriad universes. It is impossible for human beings to attain liberation if She is not merciful and removes that bondage.<sup>7</sup>

Rishis, who were well acquainted with human

psychology, were aware that the human being stands at the threshold between renunciation and enjoyment. Those who completely renounce are called 'devas', gods, and those having strong desire for sense pleasure are called *danavas* or 'asuras', demons. A human being is a mixture of both, deva and *danava*. It is as if the human mind is being churned simultaneously by godly and demoniac qualities, good and bad impulses. Farsighted rishis formulated spiritual disciplines through which desires are gradually liquidated and the mind becomes ready for the sadhana that leads to realization of the ultimate Truth and transcendence of the cycle of birth and death. Ignorance of the instincts latent in the mind and avoidance of spiritual disciplines prescribed for its purification led to the degeneration of tantra—tantra, the highest ideal presented as an alternative to Vedic ritual by Shiva himself.

### **Re-establishing the Validity of Tantra**

The Supreme Being is believed to have incarnated in the modern age in the person of Sri Ramakrishna to transform selfish people and non-believers into godly beings. The earthly journey of this incarnation began in a small but beautiful village of Bengal. His mother was a simple woman. Sri Ramakrishna started worshipping Goddess Bhavatarini at Dakshineswar in 1855–6, when he was around twenty years of age. This was crucial in reforming the spiritual discipline of tantra and re-establishing the proper mental attitude towards it. A series of wonderful events soon took place on the bank of the Ganga at Dakshineswar, a few kilometres from Kolkata, silencing the critics of tantra.

Great concentration and sincerity were the sterling qualities of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He was initiated into Kali worship by the tantric adept Kenaram Bhattacharya. Ritualistic worship and deep yearning for the realization of Kali came together in the person of Sri Ramakrishna: 'His inmost longing for God-realization was his mainstay during this period. Soon that longing grew more intense and greatly affected his body and mind. This longing brought immense love for his Chosen

Deity, and gradually it led him along the path of raga bhakti, transcending the regulations of vaidhi bhakti. That longing allowed him to finally have the direct vision of the Divine Mother and endowed him with yogic powers' (225).

Though Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Kali in an image, his first vision was that of an all-encompassing light. In his own words:

There was an unbearable pain in my heart because I could not have a vision of Mother. Just as a man wrings out a towel with all his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair. In my agony, I asked myself: 'What's the use of living this life?' Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the Mother's shrine. I decided to end my life then and there. Like a madman, I ran to the sword and seized it. Then I had a marvellous vision of the Mother ...

It was as if the room, doors, temple, and everything else vanished altogether; as if there were nothing anywhere! And what I saw was an infinite shoreless ocean of light; that ocean was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me to swallow me up. They were madly rushing towards me from all sides, with a terrific noise. Very soon they were upon me, and they pushed me down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness (212).

Though Sri Ramakrishna practised dualistic spiritual disciplines, he realized the non-dual Truth. His life shows that Vedantic realization can be attained through the path of tantra as well. His earnest prayers transformed the creative primal energy into his affectionate 'Mother'. A tantric woman adept, whom he called Bhairavi Brahmani, taught Sri Ramakrishna 'all the sixty-four sadhanas prescribed in *Vishnukranta* section of the Tantra, one after the other' (263). 'According to the Tantric tradition, there are three geographical regions, called *Vishnukranta*, *Rathakranta*, and *Ashvakranta*, and different Tantras are assigned to each one of them. According to the *Shaktimangala Tantra*, Vishnukranta extends from the Vindhya

Mountain to Chittagong, thus including Bengal; Rathakranta from the same mountain to China, including Nepal; and Ashvakranta from the same mountain to the great ocean, apparently including the rest of India' (263).

Sri Ramakrishna had had many visions and other spiritual experiences even before he started practising tantra sadhana. While sitting on his asana and performing the purificatory *nyasa* rites, the Master used to clearly see the letters of the mantras written on his body in bright colours. He also saw his kundalini awaken and proceed through the Sushumna to the Sahasrara at the crown of the head. While uttering *rang*, the *bija* mantra of fire, and sprinkling holy water around himself as part of a protective ritual, he would see a wall of fire surrounding him, guarding the place of worship.

According to the *Tantra Rashmi*, at least one of three procedures has to be practised, under the direct guidance of the guru, to attain perfection in tantra. They are *shava-sadhana*, practice involving a corpse; piercing of the six chakras; and the *pancha makaras* (five Ms), involving the use of *madya*, wine, *mamsa*, meat, *matsya*, fish, *mudra*, cereal fries, and *maithuna*, ritual copulation. An expert in tantra, Bhairavi Brahmani would bring all that was required for Sri Ramakrishna's tantra sadhana. The small details available about his tantra sadhana are enough to frighten us. The seat of his sadhana was set up north of the Panchavati at Dakshineswar. The altar had five skulls—of jackal, snake, dog, ox, and human being. Sitting on this asana Sri Ramakrishna spent many days and nights in spiritual practice.<sup>8</sup> Later he recounted some of these practices:

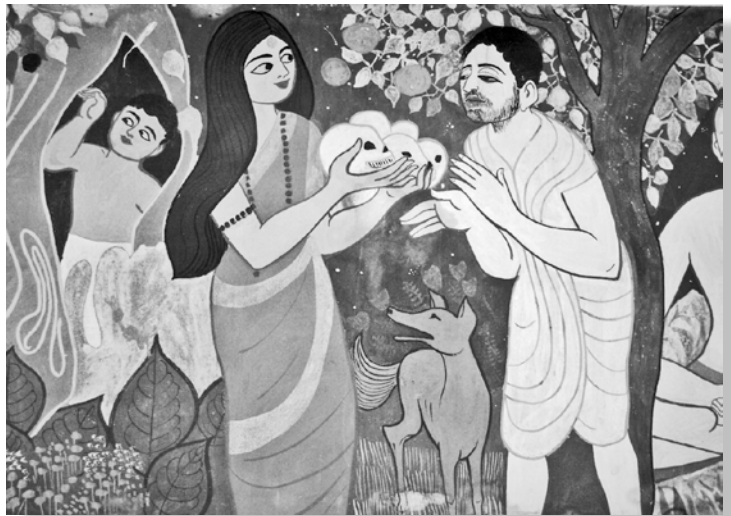
One night the Brahmani brought a beautiful young woman from somewhere and arranged the worship. She put the woman on the Devi's seat, then instructed me, 'My child, worship her as the goddess.' When the worship was over, she said to me: 'My child, think of her as the veritable Divine Mother. Sit on her lap and practise japa

wholeheartedly.' I was seized with fear, wept pitiously, and said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, why do You give this command to one who has taken refuge in You? Does Your weak child have the power to withstand such a severe trial?' As soon as I said that, my heart was filled with divine strength. Like a hypnotized person, not knowing what I was doing, I repeated the mantra, sat on the woman's lap, and immediately went into samadhi. When I regained outer consciousness, the Brahmani said: 'You have completed the rite, my child. Under such circumstances, others restrain themselves with great difficulty and finish by repeating the mantra for a very short time. But you entered samadhi, losing body-consciousness completely!' ...

One day I saw the Brahmani cook fish in a human skull and offer it to the Divine Mother. She made me do the same and asked me to eat that fish. At her command I did so, and I had no aversion in my mind.

But on another day she brought a piece of rotten human flesh, offered it to the Mother, and asked me to touch it with my tongue. I was horrified with disgust and protested, 'How can I do that?' She replied: 'What do you say, my child? Look, I am doing it.' Saying so, she put a little into her mouth. Saying 'Please shun aversion,' she placed a portion of it in front of me. As soon as I saw that, the Divine Mother's terrible form of Chandika arose in my mind; then repeating 'Mother, Mother,' I went into ecstasy. I then felt

Sri Ramakrishna's tantric sadhana under Bhairavi Brahmani



no aversion when the Brahmani put a bit of the flesh into my mouth (263).

Avadhutas, tantric adepts, should be free from such bondages as fear, shame, and hatred. Followers of the Aghora school of tantra conquer aversion or hatred by the methods described above.

### **Kaula of the Highest Order**

There are various rites that tantrics are to perform according to their temperament. The seven important classes of rites include Vedachara, Vaishnavachara, Shaivachara, Dakshinachara, Vamachara, Siddhantachara, and Kaulachara. There is another tradition called Samayachara, which the great tantric Bhairavi Brahmani followed while guiding Sri Ramakrishna in the path of tantra. This tradition, involving the worship of Shodashi or Srividya, was followed by ancient masters like Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, and Shukadeva, and was especially developed in Kerala. The followers of Samayachara meditate on Ananda Bhairavi and Ananda Bhairava in the lotus of the Sahasrara. Shiva, the primal Consciousness, and Shakti, primal Energy, unite to provide ineffable and supreme bliss devoid of all duality.

Explaining this experience, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I do remember the day I witnessed the union of a man and a woman: I perceived only the divine sport of Shiva and Shakti, and went into samadhi. When I regained outer consciousness, the Brahmani told me: "My child, you have attained perfection in an extremely difficult esoteric sadhana and are established in the divine mode"' (264).

According to the Agamas, those who succeed in the pure practice of *pancha makaras* are called Kaulas. Kaulas are Shaivites outwardly, Shaktas inwardly, and Vaishnavas—in terms of humility and reverence—when in groups. In one of his hymns, Swami Vivekananda describes Sri Ramakrishna as follows: '[He] whose mind ever dwelt on the non-dualistic Truth, whose personality was covered by the cloth of Supreme Devotion, who was ever active (for the good of humanity) and whose actions were all superhuman.' Was he indicating that Sri

Ramakrishna is a Kaula of the highest order?

Samayacharin tantrics prefer mental worship to external rituals. According to Samayachara, there are no strict rules for worship. The goal of Samayachara is to realize the unity of Shiva and Shakti, of Brahman and Kali—for they are indeed inseparable, like 'milk and its whiteness' or 'fire and its burning power', to use Sri Ramakrishna's words. If a sadhaka realizes this, he becomes blessed and is liberated from all bondage.

The Brahmani, who Sri Ramakrishna indicated was a part of Yogamaya, was an adept in tantra and so could successfully guide him through numerous tantric rituals that resulted in remarkable experiences. He had the vision of the *brahmayoni*, cosmic womb. He heard the *anahata*, unstruck, sound of Pranava. He had a vision of the Divine Mother's maya, in which a beautiful lady gave birth to a baby, nursed it affectionately, and finally, assuming a very cruel appearance, swallowed it. He had visions of the Divine Mother's forms with two hands as well as ten. Thus, practising all the sixty-four sadhanas prescribed in the Vishnukranta section of the tantras, Sri Ramakrishna confirmed tantra as a path to God-realization.

Though he acquired yogic powers, Sri Ramakrishna never liked to use them for any worldly need. Rather, he discouraged spiritual aspirants from practising tantra in order to acquire such powers. He inspired the followers of tantra to realize the oneness of Shiva and Shakti and be free from all bondage.

### **Why Did He Practise Tantra?**

Why did Sri Ramakrishna practise this difficult path of tantra? To demonstrate that tantra is as perfect a path for God-realization as Vedic sadhana. His disciple Swami Saradananda says, 'Once again, India will become blessed and will grace others by worshipping the Brahmashakti awakened by Sri Ramakrishna.'<sup>10</sup> Further: 'Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Every incarnation has worshipped Shakti. None can become a world teacher without the special grace of Shakti. Without this grace, none can deluge the masses of the nation with the strong cur-

rent of the Ganga of religious instruction” (37).


Sri Ramakrishna himself embodied the ideal of tantra sadhana: the union of Shiva and Shakti. Once, he was pacing up and down the north-eastern veranda of his room. Mathuranath was then sitting by himself in one of the rooms of his mansion—right across Sri Ramakrishna’s room—watching him. All of a sudden, Mathur ran up to him, clasped his feet, and described a strange vision he had just had: ‘Father, I was watching you just now as you walked back and forth. I saw it distinctly: As you walked towards me, you were no longer yourself. You were the Divine Mother Kali from the temple! Then, as you turned around and walked in the opposite direction, you became Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was some kind of optical illusion. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but I saw the same thing.’ Later, Sri Ramakrishna would say: ‘Was it for nothing that Mathur served me and loved me so much?’<sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna is Kali herself—this truth was expressed in different ways at different times. Sri Ramakrishna’s cousin Haladhari was a great scholar, but after the demise of his son he started calling Kali the ‘goddess of *tamas*’. To convince him of the divinity of Kali, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother and then, jumping on to Haladhari’s shoulder in an ecstatic mood said in an excited voice: ‘How dare you say that Mother is wrathful and full of *tamas*. She is everything. She is the embodiment of the three *gunas* and again She is pure love and goodness’ (232). On receiving this spiritual touch, Haladhari had the vision of the Divine Mother in Sri Ramakrishna’s person, and filled with devotion accepted his words.

‘The future’, Swami Vivekananda believed, would ‘call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali.’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I think there’s no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends.’<sup>12</sup> Swami Ramakrishnananda observed: ‘It was the Mother of the universe, Kali, who incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna to bestow knowledge and devotion to her sons and daughters.’<sup>13</sup>

One may ask, if Sri Ramakrishna was himself the Divine Mother, then whom did he pray to and call

‘Mother’? Was he praying to himself? To answer in his own words, ‘I saw Satchidānanda come out of this sheath. It said, “I incarnate Myself in every age.” I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satchidānanda Itself spoke, saying, “Chaitanya, too, worshipped Sakti.”’<sup>14</sup> He also said: ‘There are two persons in this [his own body]. One, the Divine Mother—yes, one is She. And the other is Her devotee’ (943).

The same divinity practised austerities as Sri Ramakrishna and also bestowed the vision of Mother Kali upon devotees. Why did this divine play take place? Because of his love for humanity. Sri Ramakrishna used to call both the subtle and the gross universe the kingdom of Shakti. By worshipping Shakti he awakened the spiritual energy inherent in humankind and also showed it the realm beyond this universe of Shakti. 

## Notes and References

1. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society, 2003), 540–1.
2. In some traditions the last four are replaced by Lakshmi, Uma, Ganesha, and Aditya.
3. See Swami Prajnanananda, *Tantre Tattva O Sadhana* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1417 BE), 3.
4. Swami Saradananda, *Bharate Shaktipuja* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 1415 BE), 1.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.364.
6. *Tantre Tattva O Sadhana*, 3.
7. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 557.
8. See *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 261.
9. *Complete Works*, 8.175.
10. *Bharate Shaktipuja*, 2.
11. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 491.
12. *Complete Works*, 8.264.
13. *Vishwachetanay Sri Ramakrishna*, eds Swami Prameyananda, Naliniranjana Chattopadhyay, Swami Chaitanyananda (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 1407 BE), 63.
14. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2007), 720.

# Tantra: Its Origin, Nature, and Contents

Prof. Debabrata Sen Sharma

ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT INDIAN tradition, spiritual knowledge has come down to us from the hoary past in the form of two parallel thought currents called the 'Nigama' and the 'Agama'. The Vedic literature constitutes the Nigama, whereas the vast corpus of tantric literature is given the name 'Agama'—literally, 'that which has come down'. The spiritual wisdom contained both in the Nigama and the Agama is said to be beginningless, *anādi*, and eternally existent, *nitya*, in non-verbal form. It is impersonal in nature, *apauruṣeya*, as it was not composed or written by any particular person but was revealed as pure spiritual knowledge to a privileged few who possessed the capacity to hold it. This is evidenced by a mantra occurring in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'The (experiential) knowledge of Self cannot be acquired by listening to spiritual discourses, or by a sharp intellect, or by much study of the scriptures. It is revealed to that particular individual who is chosen by the Self (who acquires the necessary capacity to hold this experiential knowledge of the Self).'

Since this spiritual knowledge embodied in the Nigama and the Agama is considered to be revealed knowledge, arising as it does from the experience of spiritual Truth, it is taken as authoritative and infallible. Both the Nigama and the Agama are therefore regarded as Shruti by their followers. Shruti is the source of Smriti. Through the Smritis, different schools of Indian philosophy try to interpret and render, in logical terms, the experiential knowledge contained in the Shrutis so that ordinary people can grasp their significance. The spiritual wisdom enshrined in the Agamas has, in the same way, come down to us in the form of different spiritual traditions—Shaiva, Shakta, and Vaishnava—with a number of sub-traditions or spiritual thought

currents forming these larger traditions. This point will be clarified later when we describe the extent of tantric literature. But before doing so, the first questions to be answered are: What is Agama, and what is tantra? Are they synonymous? What are their contents?

## Agama Explained

The term 'Agama' has been derived in the *Svachchhanda Tantra* as '*āgataṃ śiva-vaktrebhya gataṃ ca girijā-mukhe*'; (Agama signifies the collection of spiritual wisdom that) having emanated from the mouth of Shiva entered into the intellect of his consort Parvati. This meaning is in accordance with the structure of Agamic texts, which, like other tantras, are in the form of dialogue—Shiva is the speaker and Parvati the hearer. There are other tantric texts—and these have also been called 'Nigama'—where Parvati is the speaker and Shiva the listener. As to the contents of the Agamas, the *Varahi Tantra* gives a list of seven topics that include the following: i) origin and dissolution of the world, ii) modes of worship of deities, iii) modes of spiritual discipline, iv) purificatory rites, and v) a group of six magical rites, technically called *ṣaṭ-karma*: *māraṇa*, vanquishing enemies; *ucāṭana*, ruining of adversary; *vaśīkaraṇa*, subjugation of enemies; *stambhana*, paralysing enemies or inimical forces; *vidveśana*, causing hostility in enemies; and *svastayana*, rites for obtaining peace and prosperity. It may be mentioned here that the Agamas and tantras are looked down upon by people on account of the inclusion of these *ṣaṭ-karma* in the list of contents—the general expectation is that this class of literature should shed light on purely spiritual subjects, as the Upanishads do, rather than deal with mundane matters. The main reason for including mundane issues in the Agamas appears to be a con-

cern for achieving the general well-being of people together with their uplift in society, *abhyudaya*, as well as their elevation in the spiritual field, *niḥśreyasa*, as is the case with the Atharva Veda.

It may be pointed out here that most Agamic texts do not treat their subjects from the traditional viewpoint. All available Agamas contain a fourfold content: 'Vidya-pada', section dealing with metaphysics; 'Kriya-pada', section dealing with rituals; 'Yoga-pada', section laying down modes of spiritual disciplines; and 'Charya-pada', section prescribing the daily routine of a spiritual seeker. Agamic texts are generally voluminous, hence this fourfold division of content. Some Agamas, popular with followers of the Shaiva Siddhanta tradition, also contain description of *vāstu śāstra*, temple architecture, and *mūrti-nirmāṇa śāstra*, sculptures of deities.

### Tantras Explained

Most of the tantra texts—as distinct from Agama works—are short in size; therefore their contents do not have a clear-cut division. These texts generally put more stress on the *kriyā*, practice, aspect of spiritual thoughts than on the metaphysical aspect, because the tantras are mainly sadhana oriented. The term 'tantra' is generally derived from the Sanskrit root *tanu*, meaning 'extension'. It can be expounded in Sanskrit in this way: '*Tanyate vistīryate aihika-pāralaukika ubhayavidha abhyudaya sādhanakāṇ arthān-iti tantram*'; tantra is that (body of knowledge) in which the ways and means for both worldly and spiritual growth are elaborated.' Ishanagurudeva Mishra has suggested a different root for the term 'tantra': *tatri*, meaning support or nourishment. According to him, the word 'tantra' stands for that literature which supports or provides nourishment to society.

In common parlance the word 'tantra' conveys the sense of an organized system of thought, or Shastra. We can cite the examples of *Shashthi Tantra*—ascribed to Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy—and *Tantra Vartika*, a text dealing with the Mimamsa school.

As to the contents of the tantras, the *Varahi*

*Tantra* gives a long list of twenty-four topics, which include the following: the creation and dissolution of the world; classification of deities; description of *tirthas*, holy places; laws and duties for people in their different ashramas, stations of life; classification of embodied beings; use of different *yantras*, mystical diagrams; consecration of trees; classification of planets and stars; prescription of rules for vows; distinction between pious and sinful deeds; and description of different psychic centres in the physical body. A perusal of the long list of contents in any tantra text shows their encyclopaedic nature, but most of the tantras being short in size do not cover all of these topics.

In this connection it would perhaps be useful to reproduce the views of Abhinavagupta (*fl.* 1014), the celebrated exponent of the Advaita Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir, who presented in his magnum opus *Tantraloka* (Light of the Tantras) the spiritual wisdom contained in tantric and Agamic texts, examined from a metaphysical point of view. He has also traced the steps of the descent of this wisdom to the mundane level. He tells us that the nature of the supreme spiritual wisdom is one, infinite, *akhaṇḍa*—part-less—and eternally identified with the Supreme Being in the form of his self-reflective experience: *aham parāmarṣa* or *pūrnāhamtā*. That spiritual wisdom is termed *parā vāk*, transcendent word. When the Supreme Lord resolves out of his *svatantra icchā*, free will, to manifest himself as the universe by exercising his divine power—*svecchayā svabhittau viśvam-unmīlayati*—he not only manifests as the world, but simultaneously his self-reflective experience as *pūrnāhamtā* or *parā vāk* also manifests in verbal form. The descent of the *parā vāk*, however, takes place in three steps: *paśyantī*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*. These three steps represent the process through which non-intellectual, or non-conceptual, and non-verbal knowledge is gradually converted into intellectual knowledge expressed in verbal form. The 'great knowledge' remains non-conceptual as *madhyamā vāk*, but it assumes gross form in the realm of *maya* when it is manifested on the mundane level as *vaikharī vāk*,



verbal forms we are familiar with. It then becomes capable of being grasped by our finite mind. All the Agamas and tantras, therefore, represent the *parā vāk* taking the form of *vaikhari vāk* through the process of evolution.

### **Agamic Wisdom in Verbal Form—the Traditional View**

The *Srikanthi Samhita*, a tantric text now lost, describes in detail the manner the Agamic wisdom, taking verbal form, emerged from the five faces of the Supreme Lord Shiva at the time of the manifestation of the world. The five faces of Bhagavan Shiva, opening in different directions, bear different names: Sadyojata, opens to the western side; Vamadeva, to the northern side; Ishana, to the southern side; Tatpurusha, to the eastern side; and Aghora, on top, opens upwards. Jayaratha, in his commentary on the *Tantraloka*, tells us about the ten Shaiva Agamas—which propagate dualist philosophical thought—that emerged from the different combinations of one, two, or three faces of Shiva. The names of these Agamas vary in different lists. The Shaiva Agamas usually include the following: Kamika, Yogaja, Chintya, Karana, Dipta, Ajita, Su-

kshma, Sahasraka, Amshubheda, and Suprabhedha. The majority of these Agamas survive in South India, where the dualist Shaiva school, called Shaiva Siddhanta, has flourished. These Agamas constitute the scriptural base of Shaiva Siddhanta thought.

Eighteen Raudra Agamas, propagating dualistic-cum-monistic Agamic thought, are also believed to have emanated from various combinations of Shiva's faces. The Raudra Agamas include the following: Vijaya, Nihshwasa, Makuta, Madgita, Parameshwara, Mukhabimba, Siddha, Santana, Narasimha, Chandramshu, Virabhadra, Agneya, Svayambhuva, Visara, Vimala, Kirana, Lalita, and Sautreya. Many of these Agamas are lost; some survive in the form of long quotations in the texts belonging to Vira Shaivism, popular in Karnataka.

The Bhairava Agamas are sixty-four in number and propagate purely non-dualistic thought. These are said to have been given out of Shiva's Aghora face along with the face of his Shakti, named Yogini, which opens only when all of Shiva's four other faces close. It is also called the *hārda-linga*, the heart of Shiva and Shakti in union. The sixty-four Bhairava Agamas are first classified under eight groups, each consisting of eight Agamas. The eight groups of Bhairava Agamas are as follows: (i) Yamalashtaka, (ii) Bhairavashtaka, (iii) Mangalashtaka, (iv) Matashtaka, (v) Chakrashtaka, (vi) Shikhashtaka, (vii) Vagishashtaka, and (viii) Bahurupashtaka. The vast majority of these texts are lost; only some are partially available or are found as quotations in other texts. Some survive in countries like Cambodia, where they were taken in the ninth century. Prominent among these are *Binashikha*, *Sammoha*, and *Damara*.

We have mentioned only one list of sixty-four Bhairava Agamas mentioned in the *Srikanthi Samhita*; but there are six more such lists of Bhairava Tantras provided by texts like the *Vamakeshwara Tantra*, *Sarvollasa Tantra*, *Siddhisara Tantra*, and others. Nothing more can be said about them, since the majority of these, mentioned in different lists, exist only in name or in quotations.

*Bagalamukhi Matrika, 19th century, watercolour*



### Classification of Tantra-Agamic Thought

We have mentioned that the Agamic or tantric tradition can be broadly classified under three heads—Shaiva, Shakta, and Vaishnava. These were parallel religio-spiritual traditions that flourished in different parts of the country, and each one of them developed a vast corpus of tantric literature. A brief account of the literature produced under the Shaiva tradition has already been given. The Vaishnava tradition is as old as the Shaiva and Shakta traditions, but not as rich as the latter in so far as the corpus of Vaishnava tantras is concerned. It also developed in the southern part of India and gradually travelled to the north. Representative of the Vaishnava Agamic tradition are the Pancharatras, which are said to be part of the Kanva branch of the Shukla Yajur Veda, technically called the Ekayana thought current. According to the *Jayakhyā Samhita*, the propagators of this tradition included Shandilya, Bharadwaja, Maunjayana, Kaushika, and Narada. It was also called the Bhagavata or Satattva tradition. According to Schrader, the total number of Samhita texts is two hundred and fifteen, out of which thirteen have been published so far. Following are some of the representative texts of this tradition: *Ahīrbudhnyā Samhita*, *Ishvara Samhita*, *Jayakhyā Samhita*, *Parashara Samhita*, *Vishnu Samhita*, and *Lakṣmī Tantra*.

The characteristic feature of the Shakta tradition is the worship of Shakti as goddess conceived of in different forms. The divine Shakti embodied as goddess is called Mahavidya, of which there are ten different forms. These are: Kali, Tara, Shodashī or Tripurasundarī, Bhuvaneshvarī, Bhairavī, Chhinnamastā, Dhumavatī, Bagalamukhī, Matangi, and Kamalā.

There is a considerable amount of literature describing the nature, form, and modes of worship of each of these Mahavidyas. It is believed that the forms of these ten goddesses were revealed to their respective devotees in meditation. Metaphysicians look upon the divine Shakti as an abstract expression of the supreme Reality, but to devotees interested in pursuing sadhana she is conceived of as having one of the ten forms mentioned above. Sri

Ramakrishna said this in his inimitable way: 'Brahman is Shakti; Shakti is Brahman. They are not two.' Further, 'That which sports with Kālā is called Kālī. She is the Primal Energy. Kālā and Kālī, Brahman and Shakti, are indivisible.'

Out of the ten Mahavidyas, Kālī and Tripurasundarī have been popular almost all over the country. Kālī is worshipped in different forms: Dakṣhiṇā Kālī, Vāmā Kālī, Shmashānā Kālī, Bhadrā Kālī, Guhyā Kālī, and others. The Krama school, which flourished in Kashmir, states that Kālī has ten distinct forms as is briefly described in the *Krama-stotra*, written by some unknown author and with a commentary called *Krama Keli*, now lost but quoted by Abhinavagupta in the fourth chapter of his *Tantraloka*. The religio-philosophical tenets of the Krama school have been described by Maheshwarananda Nath in his *Mahārtha-manjari*, and by Shivananda Nath in the *Mahanaya Prakasha*.

The *Kulārṇava Tantra* mentions a fivefold division of the Shakta tradition, called Amnayās. These are: Purvā, the eastern; Dakṣhiṇā, the southern; Pashchīmā, the western; Uttarā, the northern; and Urdhvā, the upper. The great centres of the Shakta tradition are Kashmir in the North, Kanchī in the South, Kamakhya in the East, and Purnagiri, Oddiyana, and Jalandharapitha in different parts of North India. Kashmir—known in ancient times as Sarada Desha, land of the goddess of learning—and Kanchī were recognized as the main centres for the propagation of the Sri Vidya school, forming part of a powerful Shakta cult. Acharya Shankara is said to have performed his sadhana following the spiritual practices laid down in the Sri Vidya school. This is evident from his establishing a *śrīvidyā cakrā* in all the *maths*, monasteries, established by him. The city of Srinagar owes its name to Sri Vidya and it was acknowledged as a great centre of this tradition.

Kamakhya in Assam has been an important centre of the Kaula school, also belonging to the Shakta tradition. The famous yogi Matsyendranath was the founder the Yoginī Kaula, one of the seven Kaula schools. Lakshmidhara, in his commentary on the *Saundaryalaharī* of Acharya

Shankara, mentions all the seven Kaula schools. Abhinavagupta was responsible for incorporating the tenets of this school into the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, as one of his spiritual teachers was Shambhunath, a famous Kaula sadhaka.

The Kaulas prefer to follow the Vamachara, left-hand practices, of the Shakta tradition, unlike the followers of the Sri Vidya tradition who prefer the Dakshinachara, right-hand practices. Vamachara became very popular in Bengal, Assam, and Nepal. The *Svachchhanda Tantra* explains who a Kaula is. *Kula* signifies 'Shakti', *kundalini shakti*, and *akula* means 'Shiva'. The union of *kula* and *akula* is the aim of all Kaula sadhana.

There is a great deal of misconception about Vamachara practices due to the secrecy observed by its followers, who are accused of performing obnoxious rituals technically called *pañca-makāra sādhanā*. Very few people know that all the five modes this spiritual discipline involves are symbolic in nature and have an inner spiritual meaning. For those who are not acquainted with them, these practices appear to be abnormal, but the inner symbolic meaning is revealed to a select few after they have been initiated and properly trained by a qualified guru. The *pañca-makāra* are enumerated thus:

*Madyam māmśam ca mīnam ca  
mudrā maithunam-eva ca;  
Makāra-pāñcakam prāhur-  
yoginām mukti-dāyakam.*

Wine, meat, fish, cereal fries, and (ritual) intercourse are called the 'five Ms' that give liberation to yogis.

The *Kularnava Tantra* and the *Vishvasara Tantra* reveal the hidden meanings of these terms. For instance, the *Kularnava* tells us that the term *madya* does not mean 'wine'; it signifies the nectar that oozes out, drop by drop, from the thousand-petalled lotus situated in the crown of the sadhaka's head. The sadhaka is enjoined to 'drink' this nectar and become intoxicated with delight during the practice of *kundalini yoga*. The experience of delight arises from having established contact with the true essence:

*Vyoma-paṅkaja-niḥsyanda-  
sudhā pāna ratāḥ narāḥ;  
Madhu-pāyī samah proktāstu  
itare madya-pāyinaḥ.*

Men absorbed in partaking of the nectar dripping from the lotus in the space (of *sahasrāra*) are spoken of as none other than 'partakers of wine', the rest (who take the term 'wine' in its gross sense) are mere drunkards.

The *Gandharva Tantra* says the same thing:

*Jihvāgalayoh saṁyogāt  
pibeta sadāmytam tadā;  
Yogibhiḥ pīyate tat-tu  
na madyam gauḍa-paiṣṭikam.*

One ought to then drink incessantly of the nectar through the junction of the tongue and the throat, for this is the wine the yogis drink and not that distilled from molasses and grain.

A knower of yoga who after killing the 'animal' in himself (the lower self) with the sword of knowledge dissolves his mind in the ultimate Being is said to be a 'flesh-eater'. This is asserted by the *Kularnava Tantra*:

*Puṇyāpuṇye paśū hatvā jñāna-khadgena yogavit;  
Pare layam nayec-cittam māmśāśi sa nigadyate.*

Inhalation and exhalation through the nostrils are the two fishes that always 'swim' through the two *nāḍīs*—*idā* and *piṅgalā*. Sadhakas are advised to 'devour' them and thereby stop their movement by undertaking pranayama; this enables them to attain the state of *kumbhaka*, suspension of breath. It is only by reaching this state that one has the vision of the luminous Self. According to the *Agamasara Tantra*:

*Gaṅgā-yamunayor-madhye  
dvau matsyau carataḥ sadā;  
Tau matsyau bhakṣayet yat-tu  
sa bhavet matsya-sādhakaḥ.*

In the channels termed Ganga and Yamuna two fishes roam perpetually; one that eats this pair of fishes is said to be a partaker of fish.

(Continued on page 397)

# Tantra and Kali: Some Reflections

Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty

KALI'S IMAGE IS SHAPED IN black stone or clay, standing—with her right feet slightly ahead of the left—on the breast of Shiva, carved in white stone. She is envisioned as *saumyā*, amiable, or *raudrī*, dreadful, with protruded tongue. She bears a garland of decapitated human heads, carries a sword and a decapitated human head dripping blood in her two left hands, and her two right hands grant boons and assurance from all fear. This is the popular figure of Kali seen in the villages of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Delhi, and Himachal among other places in India. Kali, of course, is widely known both in India and abroad in present times.

According to Puranic legend, Kali was Sati in a previous incarnation. She was not invited by Daksha, her father, to a great yajna he had undertaken because his son-in-law Shiva associated with people of vulgar habits and habitat: using ashes from the funeral pyre for besmearing their bodies, drinking wine, and the like. The self-composed Shiva had earlier been insulted by Daksha at a Satra sacrifice of the gods and so he warned Sati against proceeding to her father's yajna for fear of further insult. This denial made Sati angry and consequently she began to show her might and greatness by assuming ten different forms. Among them, Kali was the foremost. In terms of the five Amnyas, paths—which are the five different faces of the Devi corresponding to the different directions—Kali belongs to Urdhva Amnaya, the upper face. To the devotee, the well-known form seen in villages and cities evokes only devotion and wonder, *camatkṛti*, and brings tears of unmixed joy.

## The Creative Energy

The term 'Kali' is derived from the verb *kal* or *kalana*, which implies 'impulsion or drive', as well as 'creation'. Abhinavagupta, a great exponent of

the Trika doctrine, discusses five concepts that are of singular relevance to the process of Creation: *kṣepa*, *jñāna*, *saṁkhyāna*, *gati*, and *nāda*. The first step is denoted by *kṣepa*, to throw—the entity that was inseparably united with the Self is thrown out in the process of Creation. The terms *antar*, inside, and *bahir*, outside, have only a relative, not absolute, significance, for in this doctrine of non-duality such divisions are untenable. The One remains steady like a tree—*vrkṣa iva stabdha divi tiṣṭhatyeka*—in its divinity. That the Devi is the essence of all Creation is eloquently revealed in the 'Ambastava' (Hymn to the Mother):

*Tvaṁ candrikā śaśini tigma-rucau rucistvam  
Tvaṁ cetanāsi puruṣe pavane balaṁ tvam  
Tvaṁ svādutāsi salile śikhini tvam-ūsmā  
Niḥsāram-eva nikhilam tvad-rte yadi syāt.*

O Mother, you are the moonbeams, the glow in objects bright; you are consciousness in living beings, power in air; you are the pleasant taste in water and heat in fire. If perchance you departed from the universe, it would lose all its worth.

The second concept is *jñāna*, objectifying the one subject: '*Idam-ittham, nānittham*; this is so, not otherwise'. *Gati* implies 'attainment', though only to a certain point. *Samkhyāna* is viewing the universe in its multiplicity. And lastly, all the waves become one in the peaceful repose of the Self, which manifests as the perpetual sound energy, *nāda*: this is the direct vision of the Mother. Though we know that she is the Mother who has given us birth, we worship her as goddess, play with her as a procuress of objects of desire, and see her as Kalika at the time of death:

*Janma-kāle bhaven-mātā pūjākāle tu devatā;  
Rati-kāle bhaved-dūti mṛtyū-kāle ca kalikā.*



*Kali annihilating Raktabija*

Though we know intellectually that Mother Bhagavati is omnipresent and can assume multiple forms, we are unable to realize this truly. If the actual realization were to occur, it would be a precious and everlasting gift from the Mother. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: ‘*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*; all this is Brahman.’ Three distinct entities are suggested by this statement: *sarva*, all; *idam*, this; and Brahman. But though these three divisions are apparent to our view, the Upanishads also state: ‘*Neha nānāsti kiñcana*; there is no multiplicity whatsoever.’ The appearance of the many is deceptive; it is the oneness of Brahman that shines everywhere and through everything.

Tantric texts conceive of Kali variously. She is *śakti*, energy, *spanda*, vibrating force, *bala*, power, *ojas*, stamina, *sāra*, essence, and *hṛdaya*, core consciousness. *Hṛdaya* is an important concept that has been thus defined: ‘*Hṛdayam bodha-paryāya*; “heart” is synonymous with “consciousness.”’ She remains associated with every action of our existence though she remains apparently inaccessible—much like our shadow, which we can never bring under our feet.

In his *Tantraloka*, Abhinavagupta writes about twelve different forms of Kali: i) Srishti Kali, associated with Creation; ii) Sthiti Kali, responsible for maintenance of Creation; iii) Samhara Kali, responsible for destruction; iv) Rakta Kali, the ‘Kali of blood’; v) Svakali or Su-kali, ‘the good Kali’;

vi) Yama Kali, ‘the Kali of restraint’; vii) Mrityu Kali, ‘the Kali of death’; viii) Rudra Kali, ‘the terrible Kali’; ix) Bhadra Kali, ‘the auspicious Kali’; x) Paramarka Kali, ‘the brilliant or shining Kali’; xi) Martanda Kali, ‘the Kali of the Sun’; xii) Kalagni-rudra Kali, ‘the Kali of the fire of destruction.’ Each of these forms has a particular esoteric significance that is revealed to the worshipper by the guru. Abhinavagupta is reluctant to discuss these details, for the truth is a *rahasya*, secret, that can be grasped only by the competent practitioner,

the sincere seeker treading this path. Ancient seers sound this warning: ‘*Na atirahasyam sarvatra khyāpyam na tu sarvathā gopyam*; the highly esoteric truth should not be discussed in all places, nor should it be kept eternally hidden.’ Withholding such teachings permanently will only result in their being lost for ever. Therefore, the truth should be revealed to the genuine seeker. Yaskacharya in his *Nirukta*, as well as Manu in his famous *Smṛiti*, remind us that the *vidyā*, spiritual knowledge, that has been mastered by the brahmanas is a treasure that ought not to be withheld from the worthy: *Vidyā ha vai brāhmaṇam-ājagāma gopāya mā śevadhi*.

### **Pratimā, Mantra, Yantra, and Pīṭha**

But not every person is a real seeker of truth. If given to incompetent people, *vidyā* will definitely lose its potency; it would become *avīryavatī*, devoid of potency. During the worship of the Divine Mother in images, her life force, *prāṇa*, is invoked to make the worship living and fruitful. If this vital energy is withdrawn from the figure, the worship has little value. Tantric practitioners remind us that every image—whether made of clay, stone, gem, or gold—becomes unworthy of worship when it loses its *prāṇa*, vitality or essence, the *hṛdaya bodha*, the consciousness attuned with the consciousness of the worshipper that, in reality, is one with the universal Self. When imbued with this *prāṇa*, every image abides in the universal *spanda*, cosmic vibration.

Mantra is a key element of tantric practice. In the language of Trika, *aham*, literally 'I', strings together like a garland all that is *parā*, the transcendent, *parāparā*, that which abides in everything, and *aparā*, the immanent, as well as *nara*, the human being, Shakti, and Shiva. *Aham* begins with *a* and ends with *ha*. It thus encompasses the entire alphabet. Hence, *aham* gives every mantra its life, and the real guru views everything as an emanation of the mantra. *Aham* also represents the Self. Only when a thing is viewed as one with the Self does it become a source of joy. A verse, song, or hymn is truly pleasing only when it is resplendent with the potency of Brahman, *samasaukhya*.

The Sri Chakra yantra, another representation of the Devi, is of seminal importance in tantric worship. The Divine Mother is called *ambikā* or *ambā*, and in ordinary language *mā*. The central *bindu*, dot, in the Sri Chakra represents *ambikā*. The Sri Chakra also has nine triangles or *cakras*, the *navayoni*. Of these, five have their apices turned downwards and four point upwards. The upper intersections of these triangles are the regions where the Devi is worshipped as diverse powers. The *bindus* of these intersections are named *vāmā*, the pleasing, and *icchā*, will; *jyesthā*, the pre-eminent, and *jñānā*, knowledge; *raudrī*, the fearsome, and *kriyā*, action; and *ambikā*, the Mother, and *śāntā*, peaceful, in the centre.

The Shakti Pithas, the fifty-one places where the dismembered body of Sati is known to have fallen, are particularly auspicious for tantric sadhana. In ancient times, however, only four Pithas were considered to have particular significance. The *Yogini Hridaya*, a widely read tantric text commented upon by Amritananda, mentions the names of Pithas symbolically: *kā pū*

*jā*. *Kā* indicates Kamakhya; situated near the Brahmaputra, this Pitha influenced the tantra tradition of eastern and central India. In the Champawat district of Uttarakhand bordering Nepal is Purnagiri, near Tanakpur; it lies on the old route to Kailas and Manasarovar. Jalandhara in Punjab has been another great centre of learning of tantra and Agama. The fourth important Pitha is Hinglaj, now in Pakistan, where Sati's *brahmarandhra*, crown, is said to have fallen.

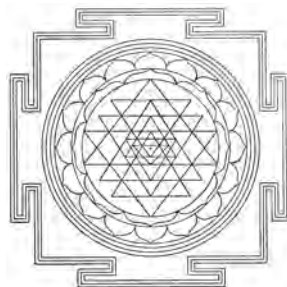
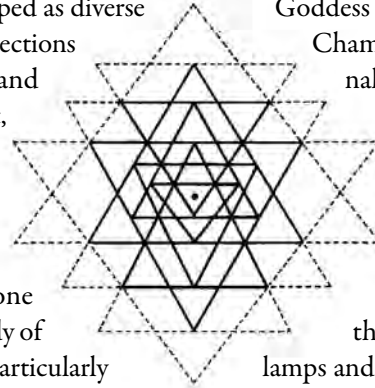
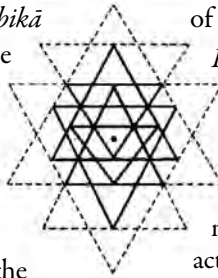
Though the Devi is worshipped in various forms, the ten forms represented by the Dashamahavidya are of particular importance. And, of these, Kali is the foremost. It is her name that is listed first among the ten Mahavidyas. She is followed by Tara and Shodashi. These three Shaktis help in the attainment of perfection. The *gāyatrī mantra* of Kalika is as follows:

*Kālikāyai vidmahe śmaśānavāsinyai dhīmahi;  
tanno ghore pracodayāt.*

Let us have the knowledge of Kalika, have the ability to meditate on her who abides in the cremation ground; let the dreadful mother lead us (on the path of knowledge and action).

Goddess Kalika is worshipped in the form of Chamunda during the autumnal and vernal puja of Devi Durga as the deity of *sandhi*, the juncture of the *aṣṭamī* and *navamī tithis*. This period—also called *viśuvat*, equivalence of opposites—spanning forty-eight minutes is considered particularly sacred. The worship is marked by the lighting of a hundred and eight lamps and the feeding of *kumārīs*, young girls, who are believed to represent the Divine Mother. In Nepal Kumari Puja is performed with the deepest love and adoration. The *kumārīs* thus worshipped would traditionally remain unmarried.

(Continued on page 401)



# ***The Crimson Hibiscus: Songs for the Divine Mother***

**Srinjay Chakravarti**

**M**USIC IS THE HIGHEST ART, and to those who understand, is the highest worship.<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda hinted that devotional songs are the supreme means of communion with the Divine—whether God is taken to be Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Durga, Kali, or the formless Brahman.

Bhajans, kirtans, and similar devotional songs form a unique treasure trove. There are devotional songs, hymns, and chants in virtually all religions; however, bhajans and kirtans—in which the most beautiful, exalted, and sublime of lyrics are expressed in the matrix of ragas and *raginis*—are particular to Indian culture. Vocal devotional music, whether Vaishnava, Shaiva, or Shakta, is a priceless cultural and spiritual legacy that has come down to us through generations of mystic Indian musicians and bards.

Among such songs, Shyama-sangit or Kali-kirtan enjoys a very special place. These songs of devotion to Divine Mother Durga and her ten Mahavidya forms enjoy a unique position in the spiritual and cultural heritage not just of India but the whole world as well. Bengali hearts are particularly fond of these songs, as can be judged from their mass commercial appeal and popularity.

## ***Music to Our Years***

The composer of ‘Amar Shadh Na Mitilo’ (My Wish Remains Unfulfilled)—a song immortalized by Pannalal Bhattacharya in his plangent voice—is unknown, but it is unmatched in popularity even today:

No one in the world loves,  
this world does not know how to love;

where there is only  
love and loving, Mother,  
it is only there I yearn to go. ...  
I have wept so much, I can weep no more.

In the Bengali language there is a vast tradition of devotional songs related to a number of goddesses—Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and others—but it is the Kali-kirtan that has attained the highest glory. Indeed, Swami Vivekananda had written his famous poem ‘Kali the Mother’—amazingly, in English—glorifying Goddess Kali, the primal Power, who is both terrible death and compassionate mother:

Dancing mad with joy,  
Come, Mother, come!  
For Terror is Thy name,  
Death is in Thy breath (4.384).

Sri Ramakrishna had offered red hibiscus flowers to the Divine Mother at her adytum in Dakshineswar, as priests have done in other temples from time immemorial. He experienced that the statue of stone was none other than the very Goddess full of bliss, truth, and consciousness. Kali, the most mysterious of all goddesses, the numen of the tantras—through rites and rituals, sacrifices and oblations, verses and music, countless saints, devotees, and mystics down the ages have meditated on her divine form, far beyond the phenomenal world of the senses.

Just as the crimson hibiscus is the leitmotif of tantric rites and rituals, Shyama-sangit is the accomplished flowering of such devotion, with the joy and bliss of rhythm, melody, and harmony transcending the petty pleasures and sorrows of mortality. It is through such devotional songs that countless sages, monks, mystics, poets, and devotees have at-



tained the highest pinnacle of Self-realization. As Sri Ramakrishna once observed: ‘Ramprasad was *siddha*, perfected, in music. If one can sing with the fullest earnestness, one can realize God.’<sup>2</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna reiterated many times over that Brahman and Shakti are identical, non-different—just like fire and its burning power, like a snake and its sinuous winding, like still waters and the flowing river. On another occasion he said: ‘God is being addresses as “Mother” here, for “Ma” is an object of great love. If you can love God, she can be attained’ (55).

### Motherhood Idealized

Hinduism is one of the few religions of the world that posits the worship of God as mother as a path to reach the highest spiritual ideal. While there are references to goddesses in Buddhism and some other East Asian religions, in Greek and Roman ancient creeds, as well as in Christianity through the concept of Mother Mary, it is only in Hinduism and its offshoots that the worship of God as mother has attained a sublime manifestation.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, who at times hinted she was the Divine Mother incarnated in human form, also mentioned that Sri Ramakrishna kept her in this world to continue his work and establish the sanctity of the ideal of motherhood. Numerous people believe that she is the embodiment of the highest virtues of divine motherhood.

In an age where feminism has become a widely accepted social, cultural, and literary phenomenon, and at the same time, when women are being commodified into sexual objects in popular culture and mass media, particularly commercial films and post-modern capitalist advertising, the sublime ideal of motherhood established by Sri Ramakrishna and embodied in the form of Sri Sarada Devi has acquired an urgent dimension. The role of Shyama-sangit, or Matri-sangit in general, in disseminating this message cannot be downplayed; it is in this form of devotional music that the spiritual worship of the Divine Mother, in its purest, finest, and sweetest aspects, has been preserved throughout

centuries. And it is in the songs of Ma Kali, the dark goddess, that the glories of the Divine Mother have been largely transcribed. She creates, sustains, and destroys all the worlds in our cosmos, she is beyond all that is here, she is both immanent and transcendent and yet is always closer and dearer to us than our own earthly mothers.



Bhairavi Ragini, album painting in gouache on paper; sub-imperial Mughal style, c.1610

Sri Ramakrishna had sung Shyama-sangit and Kali-kirtan on countless occasions, along with Vaishnava *padavalis* and other bhajans and kirtans, as is recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Dewan Raghunath Ray, who used to write under the nom de plume ‘Akinchan’, composed ‘Pariye Bhabasagare’ (Afloat in the Ocean of the World) a song which was particularly liked by the Master:

Afloat in the ocean of the world,  
my body’s cockleshell  
is all at sea.  
The gale of delusion,  
the storm of temptation—  
rise irresistibly,  
O Consort of Shiva! ...

I can see no way out,  
though overwhelmed by worry;  
I swim through the waves  
and board the hallowed boat  
that is the name of Mother Durga.

It is recorded that to inspire devotees Sri Ramakrishna sang on several occasions the song 'Ma Go Ananadamayi' (Dear Mother Full of Bliss), composed by Gourmohan Ray:

Don't make me joyless, O Ma,  
you who are always full of bliss;  
apart from those two feet of yours,  
I know nothing else. ...

Day and night I float  
in the name of Durga,  
yet my burden of sorrow does not go away;  
if I die now, O beautiful consort of Hara,  
no one will ever chant  
your Durga name again.

The young Narendranath would also sing such songs at Dakshineswar, the marvellous composition 'Nibira Andhare Ma' (In Dense Darkness, Mother) being one of them:

In dense darkness, Mother,  
sparkles your formless beauty. ...

In the unending lap of darkness,  
amidst waves of great nirvana  
the nectar of eternal peace flows continually.

This lyric was written and set to music by Trailokyanath Sannyal, who wrote under the pseudonyms 'Premdas' and 'Chiranjib Sharma'. He was a member of Keshabchandra Sen's Brahmo Samaj and was deeply inspired to compose hymns to the Supreme Goddess by watching Sri Ramakrishna's passionate love for Ma Kali. This particular song is unique in its reference to an exalted state of samadhi—one which particularly attracted Narendranath, the Advaita Vedantin—engaging the formless image of Mahakali. Once Narendra sang this song in front of the Master. Mahendranath Gupta wrote: 'As Narendra sang the line, "Who art Thou, Mother, seated alone in the shrine

of samādhi?", Sri Ramakrishna went into deep samādhi and lost all outer consciousness.'<sup>3</sup> After some time Narendra again sang this song, and 'in an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna came down and sat by Narendra's side' (695). Still later, discussing this song with Mahendranath Gupta, the Master noted: 'You are right. That song has a deep meaning. A part of my mind is still drawn to it' (697).

During that memorable night at Dakshineswar, when Ma Kali appeared before Narendranath while he was asking boons from her—a turning point not just in Swami Vivekananda's life but in the history of the religious world itself—he learnt to sing a song to the Goddess. This is how Swami Saradananda has recorded this event: 'Sri Ramakrishna told Baikunthanath Sannyal, "That is Narendra; he would not accept the Mother earlier, but yesterday he did. ... After coming back from the (Dakshineswar) temple, he asked me to teach him a song to Ma Kali—I taught him 'Ma Tvam hi Tara' (Mother, You Are the Redeemer). He had sung that song the whole of last night! That is why he is sleeping now."<sup>4</sup> That song goes thus:

Mother, you are the redeemer ...  
I know that you,  
who have compassion  
for the poor and the oppressed,  
always rescue (us) from  
grief, pain, and sorrow  
in times of peril.

### **Gnostic and Meditative Worship**

In Ramprasad's songs too we find such a manifestation of the highest ideal of Self-realization. For him Kali is not just a deity; she verily is Brahman, and in his non-dualistic conceptualization the world itself is the image of the Goddess. His song 'Man Tomar Ei Bhram' (Mind, This Error of Yours) exemplifies the highest philosophy of Advaita Vedanta:

Mind, this error of yours  
has still not gone away!  
You have not seen Kali  
the way she actually is!  
The three worlds are her image;

yet knowing this you still  
don't seem to know it!

This concept has been repeatedly stressed in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings: Brahman and Adyashakti are identical, non-different.

In one of his songs, Ramprasad has expressed his veneration for the mysterious Goddess thus:

On the lotus-stage of the heart  
sways Shyama of terrible face.  
With the breeze of her mind,  
she makes day and night sway. ...

Those who have seen her dance,  
have found her refuge:  
this is what Ramprasad declares  
to the rolling beat of drums.

In his book *Ramprasad: The Melodious Mystic*, Swami Budhananda observes: 'What remains today of Ramprasad is the heritage of his songs, *bhajans* and *kirtans*, which constitute an undecaying spiritual treasure of the Bengali-speaking race. ... As long as Shakti-worship continues in Bengal, Ramprasad's songs will be sung.'<sup>5</sup>

Ramprasad is undoubtedly the foremost of all the composers and singers of Shyama-sangit; he was also the pathfinder and pioneer in this genre. There are many legends about his life and spiritual attainments, and it is no surprise that 'Ramprasadi' has become virtually synonymous with Kali-kirtan in Bengal.

As Dilip Kumar Ray once observed, the roots of Shyama-sangit and Shakta *padavalis* go far back in the mists of time to the Vedic period, with its hymns and strophes. This was the origin of all sonorous devotional music. Shyama-sangit, as a genre, traces its origins to the Puranas, to the *Devi Mahatmya*—also known as *Durga-saptashati* and popu-

larly as *Chandi*—in the *Markandeya Purana*.

In the preface to his translation of the *Chandi*, Swami Jagadishwarananda writes:

To call on God as Mother is a most characteristic feature of Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna has shown in his life that to adore God as Mother is the Sadhana best suited for this Kali age. Mother-worshippers like Rāmpresād, Kamalākānta and others also have inspired Bengal with this doctrine. Bengali Hindus are beside themselves with joy at the time of the autumnal festival of the Mother, when the Mother is worshipped continuously for four days in hundreds of earthen images. ... The Devī-cult and the Devī-māhātmyam are popular all over India but their hold over Bengal is unique.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Shyama-sangit has attained the acme of its glory in Bengal by encompassing the entire gamut of emotions, ideas, and images. The primary harbingers of Kali-kirtan were Kabikānkan Mukundaram Chakraborty's *Chandimangal* and other such long lyrics called *mangal-kavyas*. This trend has been unique to Bengal. Bengalis are known the world over for their autumnal festivals—the pujas of Durga, Kali, and Jagaddhatri—and Shyama-sangit is the melic expression of this cult. Again,

eastern India in general, and Bengal in particular, is home to a number of major Shakta pilgrimage centres—Kalighat, Kamakhya, Dakshineswar, Adyapith, Tarapith, Dhaka, and many others.

To be sure, songs of devotion to Ma Kali have been written in other Indian languages too: Oriya, Assamese, Hindi, Tamil. For instance, Subramania Bharati's 'Uzhi-kuthu' (Dance of the Deluge) has described the goddess's dance of destruction 'in a cyclonic movement of diction and imagery.'<sup>7</sup> Tulsidas himself wrote a famous paean in praise

Durga, Kalighat school, 1880



of other Kali in 'Jaya jaya jaga-janani-devi' (Victory to Devi, the Mother of the Universe). But it is Bengali which has nurtured the Shakta tradition; and Ramprasad, who was a spiritually advanced tantric, still remains unparalleled as its finest composer.

Apart from Ramprasad, many exalted sadhakas have celebrated the glories of the Divine Mother in their verses, like the great brahmana pandit and mystic devotee Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya—some say his surname was Chakraborty. He is considered second only to Ramprasad, and as far as the delicacy and sweetness of his imagery is concerned, he is still unsurpassed. The qualities of his songs, honed in their heartfelt devotion, mellifluous diction, and melodic savour have not been replicated by any other composer yet. In his song to Kamale Kamini, the Goddess on the Lotus, he says:

In whichever form  
one imagines her,  
in that form (of the Mother)  
his mind remains;

In the lake of the heart  
of Kamalakanta,  
amidst a lotus  
she arises.

### Harmony of Religions

'Jana Nare Man' (You Don't Know, O Mind) is a particularly remarkable song since it harmonizes the sectarian diversity in Hinduism. Kamalakanta asserts:

You don't know, O Mind,  
that Shyama, the Primal Cause,  
is not just a woman;  
Donning at times the hue of a (dark) cloud,  
she turns into a man.

Here Kamalakanta reconciles Shyama with Shyam, Kali with Krishna, just as Ramprasad had earlier done in 'Man Kara na Dwesha Dweshi' (Mind, Don't Hold Any Grudges):

As Shiva you take up the bugle,  
as Krishna you play the flute;  
as Rama, O Ma, you carry a bow,  
and as Kali you hold a sword.

To Ramprasad, as well as to many other mystics, Kali is identical with Krishna, Rama, Shiva, and all other deities—there is but one God in different forms. This ecumenical tolerance characterizes Bengal's tradition of Shyama-sangit from its very beginning. Indeed, Dewan Ramdulal Nandi went a step further when he wrote in 'Jenechhi Jenechhi Tara' (I Have Known, I Have Known, Tara):

I have known, have known, Tara,  
you know the spells of wizardry!  
Whoever calls you in whatever way,  
you are agreeable to that very plea.

The Mogs call you Fara-tara,  
the Firinghis, Mother, call you God,  
Khuda is the name given to you  
by Mughals, Pathans, Saiyyads, Qazis.

Ramprasad and Kamalakanta began a process of reconciliation between conflicting sects and cults—Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Shakta—which was taken forward by other composers and devotees to its logical conclusion: the harmonization of all belief systems and religions. In this, they were the precursors of Sri Ramakrishna's message of *sarva-dharma-samanvaya*, which was the result of the direct experiences Sri Ramakrishna had while practising the disciplines of different paths and traditions.

(To be concluded)

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# Swami Abhedananda: An Outstanding Personality

Prof. Haridas Mukherjee

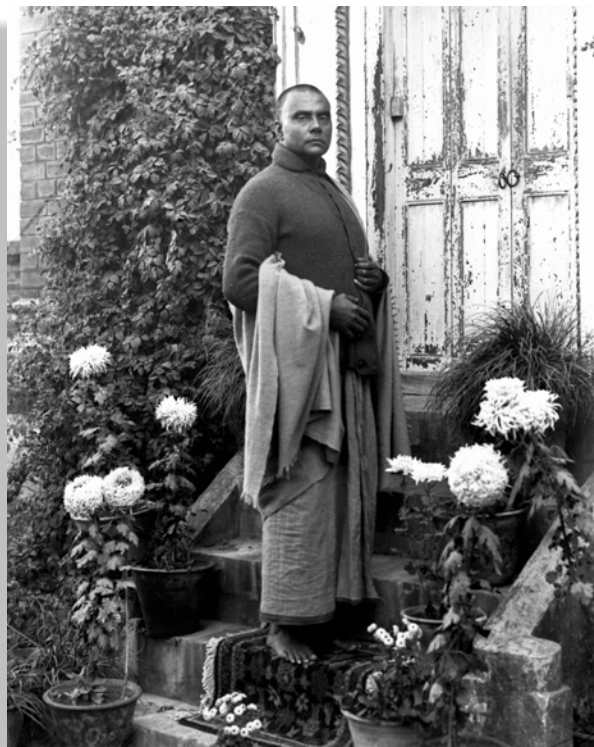
SWAMI ABHEDANANDA (1866–1939) was one of the foremost monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the great spiritual colossus of nineteenth-century Bengal. It is an irony of fate that Abhedananda, who was Swami Vivekananda's 'worthy comrade-in-arms' in the national awakening of India at the beginning of the twentieth century, has become somewhat obscure to the youthful generations of today. He was as tall and towering a personality in India's struggle for national freedom as in his apostolic zeal for propagation of Vedanta and Indian culture abroad, particularly in the US. The Nobel laureate Sir C V Raman was not exaggerating when he wrote from Bangalore on 5 August 1941: 'His [Abhedananda's] services to India in popularizing her culture and religion abroad were undoubtedly of a memorable character.' Internationally recognized scholars like Dr S Radhakrishnan and Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar have also corroborated the above view from their personal experiences.

Down to 1893 the international status quo was marked by a palpable inequality between the East and the West, the latter claiming superiority over the former. The arrogant claims of Western superiority were challenged by Vivekananda, who in 1893 threw a spiritual bombshell before the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago, as Prof. Benoy Sarkar puts it. It burst and struck the entire world with deep astonishment. His Chicago lectures challenged, perhaps for the first time and with an effective voice, the dehumanizing international situation and inaugurated the historic struggle for equality between all global communities.

While Vivekananda set India on a career of *charaiveti*, forward march, it was left to Abhedananda

to consolidate it and carry it to greater fulfilment. At Vivekananda's request, Abhedananda went to England in 1896, and his very maiden speech at the London Christo-theosophical Society scored a spectacular success. It elicited great admiration from the audience, including Vivekananda. That Abhedananda was a born teacher and preacher was proved by this very first speech. Western audiences received his utterances respectfully for almost a quarter of a century (1896–1921).

In 1897 Abhedananda crossed over to America and made New York his headquarters. The history of the Vedanta movement in the US is inseparably



linked with Abhedananda. Contemporary records bear out this truth. Swami Atulananda observes: 'The discourse [of Abhedananda] was lucid, convincing, and impressive. ... He had his subject well in hand. And his voice was clear and sonorous.' Elsewhere, he writes: 'The Swami [Abhedananda] became popular and his work increased. ... The society flourished, the intellectual world was attracted. The Swami was invited to speak before University assemblies and to address different clubs and societies. What had begun in a private unostentatious manner, developed into a public movement.' Dr Wendell Thomas, in his critical study *Hinduism Invades America*, highlights a great truth when he says: 'Paying more attention to history and his field of operation, Swami Abhedananda did more than his leader [Vivekananda] to adjust Vedanta to Western culture. Rather than overpower by flashing oratory, he seeks to convince by sweet reasonableness and a vast array of new and picturesque facts.'

Abhedananda's was a many-sided personality. The flame of patriotism ever burnt brightly in his soul. He played an important role in the Swadeshi movement, which swept over Bengal and parts of India in 1905–6. In his view, there are two essential prerequisites for a freedom movement to be successful: organization at home and propaganda abroad. It is in the second line of action that Abhedananda shone more prominently in those days. In 1906 he delivered before the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York, a series of impassioned lectures on the diverse phases of Indian civilization. On the one hand, he revealed in those lectures the greatness and profundity of Indian civilization through the ages, and exposed, on the other, the picture of chronic famine and impoverishment of India under British rule. His lectures were not just demagogic speeches, but scholarly utterances of a great Indian patriot whose 'scholarship was the despair of many'.

These lectures were soon brought out in a book entitled *India and Her People*. Originally published from New York in 1906, the sale of the book was at that time banned in India by the Bombay Government because of its seditious contents. Be-

sides, Abhedananda contributed his quota to the Swadeshi movement in another way. He returned temporarily to India in early 1906 and was accorded a right royal reception by Indians throughout the country. His Indian lectures of 1906 served as an additional stimulus to the awakened patriotism, which became organized and militant at this stage. The defensive or apologetic attitude of the Brahmo Samaj on the question of Hinduism vis-à-vis Christianity was rejected and replaced by a new vigorous movement of national self-assertion. In the political arena, Sri Aurobindo—along with Bipin Chandra Pal—emerged as the voice of resurgent Indian nationalism, which sought 'a return to our old national individuality'. And there was also Rabindranath Tagore, with his supremely creative genius.

A great patriot and a valiant fighter, Abhedananda was, above all, a philosopher of a very high order. His philosophical works such as *Reincarnation* (1900), *Spiritual Unfoldment* (1902), *Philosophy of Work* (1903), *Divine Heritage of Man* (1903), and *Self Knowledge* (1905), to mention just a few, constitute another of his claims to greatness. The renowned philosophical thinker Dr Mahendranath Sircar rightly observed in 1939: 'Swami Abhedananda excelled in proficiency in Vedanta philosophy; perhaps in that branch of learning he had hardly a peer in India.' True, he was an Advaita Vedantin in his philosophical outlook, like his great colleague Vivekananda. But it is foolish to fancy that one is the echo of the other, as each enjoyed an independent status of his own. Even when they have no doctrinal difference, they exhibit, at any rate, uniqueness of technique and logical presentation. Vivekananda was essentially a prophet; Abhedananda, a philosopher-cum-preacher. The former's lectures carried a direct appeal to the heart, while the latter's addresses were primarily meant for the intellect. In any case, theirs was not a philosophy of retreat from the struggles of life but an acceptance of it, most loyally and intensely for a larger impersonal end—the moral and material improvement of humanity. And in this, they were true to the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, their master.



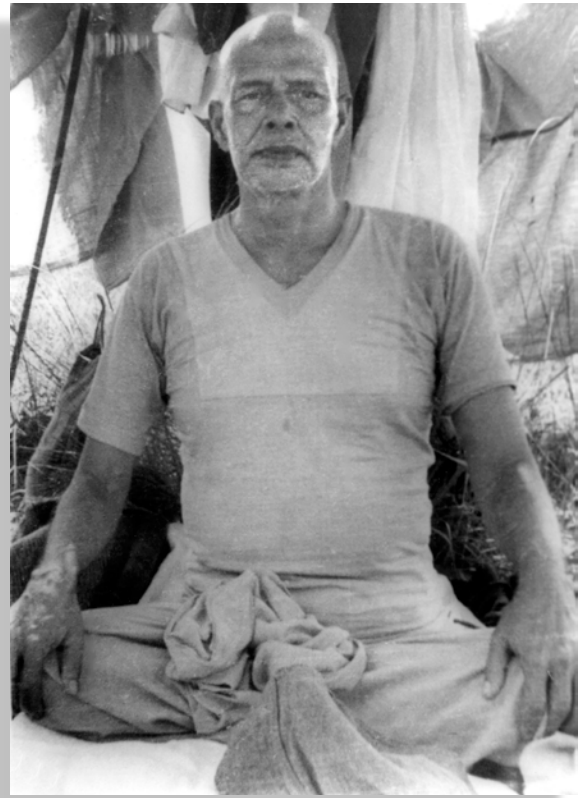
# Swami Jagadananda at Vrindaban

Swami Dhyanananda

TO BE FREED FROM THE MORTAL COIL on the sacred soil of Vrindaban is considered by Vaishnavas to be the *summum bonum* of life. On that blessed soil Swami Jagadananda, a sanyasin of the Ramakrishna Order and a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's divine consort, entered into *mahasamadhi* on 4 December 1951. During the last two years of his life, he spent in all eleven months in Vrindaban, spread over three visits. His stays in Vrindaban were a blessing to the inmates of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama. We give below an account of these times, together with the traits of his character that produced a deep impression on the minds of those who had the privilege to come in contact with him there.

Swami Jagadananda came to Vrindaban for the second time in the year 1949, his first pilgrimage to the holy town having taken place over thirty years previously. Before this second pilgrimage he had been suffering from beriberi at the Kishanpur Sadhan Kutir and was repeatedly advised to come to Vrindaban Sevashram for treatment and for a change of place. He did not come, however, until having almost completely recovered from his illness. Referring to this, he once casually remarked while at the Sevashrama: 'I thought within myself at Kishanpur, "I have been cherishing for a long time a desire to visit Vrindaban; if I go there now it will be for the treatment of my illness and not for *tirtha-darshan*. I should go there after I come round."

He reached Vrindaban in the first week of Novem-



ber 1949, accompanied by two swamis of the Order and two devotees. He had a desire to visit Kashmir also, so he had brought with him all the necessary bedding and clothing. Many a time he would refer to the beauty of Kashmir, adding that Swami Vivekananda liked Kashmir very much. One day, while going through the letters of Swami Vivekananda—a Bengali edition that Swami Prajnanananda, the monk-in-charge of the Sevashrama, had given him to read—he was very happy to come across the following words: 'This Kashmir is a veritable heaven on earth. Nowhere else in the world is such a country as this. Mountains and rivers, trees and plants, men and women, beasts and birds—all vie with one another for excellence. I feel a pang at heart not to have visited it so long.' He called Swami Prajnanananda and like a child showed him with eagerness what Swamiji had written. But due to the unsettled political situation prevailing in Kashmir at that time he was advised to drop the idea of going there.

Within a few days of his arrival at Vrindaban, he said, 'I want to begin the scriptural classes as early

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This unpublished reminiscence has been made available by Srimat Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.



as possible. Why should I sit idle?’ We had heard that he had been taking classes on Vedanta for many years and that it was a rare fortune to study Vedanta with him. But as he was already engaged for an hour each morning in teaching the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* with Shankaracharya’s commentary to the younger of the two swamis who had come with him from Kishanpur, and as he was still weak in health, we waited for about three weeks before fixing up a time suited to all for the study of the Bhagavadgita with Shankaracharya’s commentary.

The class commenced on Monday, 28 November 1949, which also happened to be the anniversary of Swami Premananda’s birth. The class used to be held every day from 1.30 to 2.30 p.m. During the first few days Swami Jagadananda deliberately proceeded very slowly with the text and the commentary, for the purpose of giving his students an understanding of what he used to call *tattva*, principle. He explained in simple language the essences of *drig-drishya-viveka*, discernment of the seer from the seen; *avastha-traya-viveka*, discernment of the three states of consciousness, namely waking, dream, and deep sleep; and *anyonyadhyasa*, mutual superimposition—on the abstruseness of which students of Vedanta break their heads for years together. Thus, by teaching how to separate oneself from the three bodies, he said that there was nothing more in Vedanta than the fact that one is none other than pure *sat-chit-ananda*, on which body and mind and their activities are superimposed due to ignorance. Even on the very second day of his classes he uttered the following significant words: ‘I have told you the whole of Vedanta. Even if you study crores of books on Vedanta, you will not get anything more. Even if I close the classes today, there is no harm, for the whole of Vedanta has been explained.’

The Gita was finished in slightly over three months’ time. Thereupon, he was in indifferent health and, although he was never tired of removing the doubts of his students by answering their questions, no further classes could be held. He left Vrindaban for Almora on Thursday, 4 May 1950, accompanied by one swami.

### A New Year’s Arrival

The inmates of the Sevashrama eagerly awaited Swami Jagadananda’s return at the tail end of the year. The swami also had developed a genuine love for Vrindaban and wanted to return with the onset of winter. But as he had to stay for some days in Kankhal and New Delhi, he could not return within the year.

On Monday, 1 January 1951, he reached Vrindaban by car from New Delhi in the company of three swamis and a devotee. He wanted to begin the classes without delay. It was decided that there should be two classes: one in which the study of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* with Shankaracharya’s commentary would be taken up, and the other in which the text of the Gita would be explained, without going through Shankaracharya’s commentary.

Three days after his arrival the classes on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* commenced. The hour fixed for the purpose was from 6 to 7 a.m. The swami began with the following significant words: ‘Shankara did not attain *brahma-jnana* by going through the scriptures, but he got it from his guru, Govindapada; Swamiji did not attain *brahma-jnana* by going through the scriptures, but he got it from his guru, Sri Ramakrishna. For the attainment of *brahma-jnana* it is not at all necessary that we should go through the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. What then is the necessity for this class? It is because Swamiji had said that the religious order which is negligent in the study of the scriptures degenerates. We are carrying out the behest of Swamiji.’

The Gita classes began on Monday, 8 January—the time was the same as in the previous year: 1.30 to 2.30 p.m. These classes were very useful, especially for those who, on account of their deficiency in Sanskrit, could not follow the commentary. In spite of their poor knowledge of the language, they were able to reap the benefit of studying Shankaracharya’s interpretation in Sanskrit without the labour that such study demands, as the swami—who never cared for any commentary other than that of Shankaracharya—always explained the text in the light of this commentary as he went along. A

class on *Vakya-vritti* and *Upadesha-sahasri* was also started in the morning for a much smaller number of students who could make time for it.

Apart from a number of days when he fell ill and the classes had to be stopped, the swami generally kept very good health, and the classes were regularly held up to 10 May. He left Vrindaban for Almora the next day but had to return from Mathura Cantonment at midnight with a party of seven sadhus and brahmacharins, as due to inadvertence he had been allotted a reserved seat in a second class compartment that would not go up to Haldwani. Early the next morning he left for Agra to board the train from there and safely reached Almora the following day.

### **Back Once More**

The swami was eager to come back to Vrindaban that winter to finish the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Although he wanted to stay at Almora as long as the cold was bearable, acting on the advice of all he returned to Vrindaban on Friday, 16 November 1951, accompanied by three swamis and one brahmacharin.

The classes on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* were resumed on 24 November. The time fixed was from 5.45 to 6.45 a.m. Another class on the same Upanishad was also held from 8 to 9 a.m. every morning at the Sevashrama house at Jnana Gudri, for four of his students—three swamis and one brahmacharin—who had come from Almora with him.

In the early-morning class on 2 December the discussion was about that portion of the commentary on the third Brahmana of the fourth chapter of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in which the existence of the other world has been suggested on the grounds that a person sometimes dreams many things that are never to be experienced in this life. Swami Jagadananda said, 'Nobody will believe that one sees the other world in a dream. But we believe in it because the Shruti says so.' One of the brahmacharins said, 'Old men who are approaching their end are sometimes heard to see visions of the other world.' He admitted this enthusiastically,

adding that the words of the Shruti have spread far and wide, and so we hear of such things from many quarters. Thereupon the class that day ended.

Little did we know then that that would be the last day of our classes with him. That evening he curtailed his walk, feeling a little tired. In the early morning of 3 December he called the brahmacharin who used to ring the bell for the morning class and asked him not to do so. This was the first time that he himself asked us to stop one of his classes. On several occasions his classes had been stopped by others in view of his health, but he had always protested on the grounds that he invariably kept fit when the classes went on. The class at Jnana Gudri was also cancelled that day.

When asked, he said that he was feeling a little weak but that it was nothing serious. He looked a little indifferent that day. He, however, took his usual breakfast and midday meal. At about 4 p.m. he disclosed that he had been having a little pain in the sub-sternum since the previous evening. Soon the pain became acute, but he did not lose his usual expression of humour. He vomited at about 5 p.m. and, as signs of acidity were apparent, he was given an antacid. One of the swamis gave him homeopathic medicine also and a humorous conversation on allopathy versus homeopathy ensued, in which he participated. 'The whole theory of *karya-karana*, cause and effect, is false,' he said, 'Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) did not believe in it.' The swami in charge of the Sevashrama opposed: 'But we have to believe in *karya-karana*!' To this he replied, 'Yes, we find that we have to accept *karya-karana* at every step of life.'

### **Mahasamadhi**

To one of the swamis attending on him he said, 'This is called "*yama-kantaka* (the thorn of Yama)", when you don't feel relief in any position.' At first it was thought that the pain might be due to angina, but that night it was diagnosed as due to coronary thrombosis. As he was reluctant to take injections, none were administered that night. He passed a sleepless and restless night in spite of administration of proper medicines. Next morning,

4 December, he said, 'If by giving me injections you can relieve me of this pain, I allow you to give me a thousand injections.' Thereupon, suitable injections were given at the prescribed times. There was some relief. However, at about 11 a.m. he nearly collapsed. He rallied with extreme difficulty and addressing the attending physicians said, 'You have brought me back from the home of Yama.'

There were further relapses at 1 p.m., 6 p.m., and 8.40 p.m. Oxygen and artificial respiration were used to help him get over the attacks. The attacks were short and abrupt, but at every one his life was despaired of. The attack at 1 p.m. was so alarming that all hope was given up and the sadhus and brahmacharins started chanting the name of Sri Ramakrishna in chorus. The final attack came at 10.17 p.m. and he succumbed to it in a minute. Except at the times of the attacks, when outward consciousness disappeared, he was in full consciousness throughout his acute suffering of about thirty hours. Even a couple of hours before giving up the body he said, 'I am giving expression to my pain. Of course, a "gentleman" would not give such expression!' He retained his humour up to the end. He was given all possible medical help, readily available in an up-to-date hospital, but the candle of life was burning itself out and all efforts to bring him back to life were of no avail. His last words were, 'Ma, Ma (Mother, Mother).' The pain ceased for ever. His whole face beamed in the lustre of a heavenly serenity.

After garlanding and arati, his mortal frame, which looked amazingly fresh, was taken to the bank of the Yamuna by the sadhus and

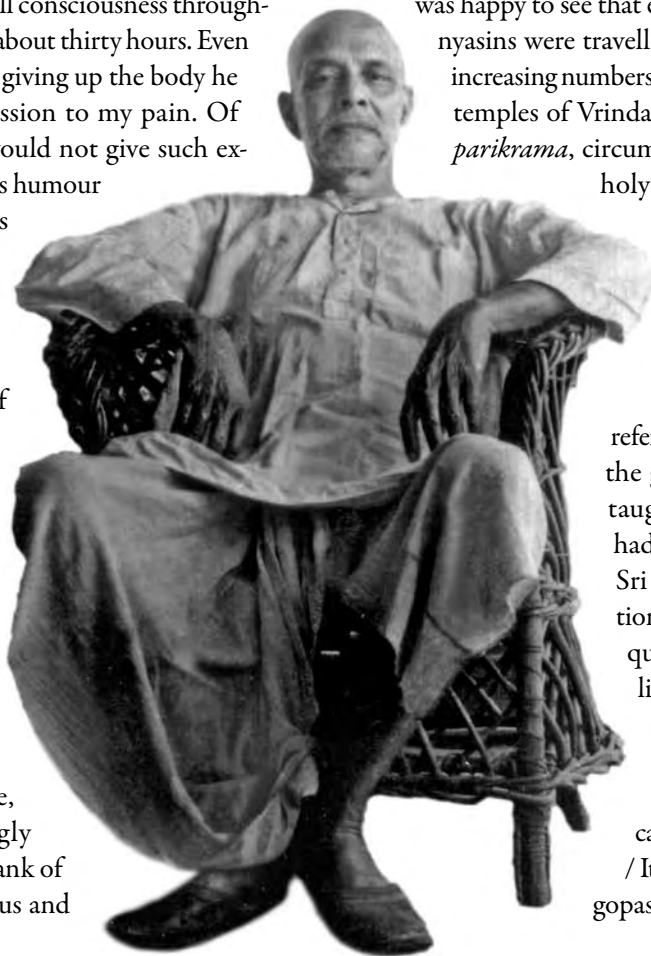
brahmacharins, as they repeated the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna. Then, after the usual bath, offerings of flowers and respects, and the chanting of the 'Purusha Sukta' the body was immersed in the sacred waters of the Yamuna—by 2.15 a.m. on 5 December 1951 the last rites were over.

A great Advaitin had passed away in the land of the dualists. To many, this would seem a curious event; but to those who knew him intimately it was quite in the fitness of things. For, although a *jnani*, Swami Jagadananda was intensely devotional at heart. He used to say that those who come to Sri Ramakrishna will not be *jnanis* merely, they will be what Sri Ramakrishna called *vijnanis*; they will have both *jnana* and *bhakti*. He loved Vrindaban very much and used to say that Vrindaban was sure to rise as Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda had all been and stayed there. He

was happy to see that even Dashanami sannyasins were travelling to Vrindaban in increasing numbers. He visited the main temples of Vrindaban and performed *parikrama*, circumambulation, of the holy place. He went to

Nandagram, Barsana, Govardhana, and Radhakunda also, even in his failing health. On

several occasions he referred to the lesson that the gopis of Vrindaban taught Uddhava, who had asked them to see Sri Krishna in meditation. He would at times quote the following lines from a song that Sri Ramakrishna used to sing: 'In Vrindaban alone can pure love be found / Its secret none but the gopas and gopis know.'



At the feet of Swami Jagadananda we have learnt the lessons of bhakti no less than those of jnana. All arguments over a doubtful question would immediately be put to an end with one quote from the words of Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother, or from the works of Swamiji. He was a great advocate of Shankaracharya and encouraged us to thoroughly study all his works. After one had mastered Shankaracharya's works, he recommended the study of Sureshwaracharya and Sarvajnatman Muni. He dissuaded us from wasting time reading many books and was anxious to see that we studied the most authoritative books in their proper order. In his classes, again and again he would draw our attention to the ultimate purpose of studying Vedanta. He did not want us to study Vedanta for the purpose of becoming pandits or lecturers. He used to say, 'If you have any such ulterior motive you will never attain *atma-jnana* (knowledge of the Self). You should study Vedanta for the sake of Vedanta. Without "*tvam-padartha-viveka* (discernment of the meaning of the term 'you' in the Vedantic dictum 'you are That')" you will never be able to advance one step in the understanding of Vedanta.' He would say, 'I wonder, when one has left home and become a sadhu for the sake of God, what obstruction there can be in attaining *atma-jnana*.' He would take it for granted that all his students possessed the necessary qualifications for attaining the supreme knowledge. Even if the students themselves confessed their limitations, he would not allow them to be disappointed but would encourage them, reminding them that they were all sufficiently pure in mind since they had given up their home for the sake of God. '*Chitta-shuddhi* (purification of mind)', he would say, 'does not mean that even the slightest impure thought will never cross your minds. *Chitta-shuddhi* means *vividisha* (the desire to know [the Truth]). If you are really desirous of knowing the Truth, you will have it. Whoever wants, gets.' He repeatedly said, 'The greatest obstacle to the attainment of *brahma-jnana* (knowledge of Brahman) is to harbour the idea that it is something impossible. People think

that only the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were able to have *brahma-jnana*. But Sri Sarada Devi has said that even now many are having *divya-darshana* (divine visions) and *divya-jnana* (divine knowledge).'

### A Realized Monk

It was evident to all his students that he was fully convinced of the doctrine of Advaita which he used to teach in his classes with so much emphasis, for it was clear that he spoke with authority. He avoided speaking about his own experiences; nevertheless, on some occasions he vouchsafed to us the confirmation that he had nothing more to attain in life. On the morning of Thursday, 25 January 1951, he was seated under the sun on a cot in front of the office veranda of the Sevashrama, when a brahmacharin, hesitant to put the question directly, elicited the answer indirectly by referring to a talk that he had had with a disciple of Mahapurush Swami Shivananda some years ago. The brahmacharin said, 'A disciple of Mahapurush Maharaj mentioned to me the names of some of our sadhus still living, including yours, and told me that they were all *brahmajnas* (knowers of Brahman).' Swami Jagadananda heard this as naturally as he used to hear the thousand and one other questions that were put to him day in and day out. He wanted the names to be repeated and when that was done he replied, 'There are possibly others as well. *That I am one, I know.*'

He was never found to sit for japa or meditation. He had a very old rosary but he was never seen to tell his beads. His purpose of life was already served. On 13 December 1949 he said, 'Nowadays people do not have firm faith in Vedic mantras. Few believe that the Gayatri alone can give *brahma-jnana*, so people run after tantric initiation. The Bhagavata also advises people to follow both Vedic and tantric enjoyments. Everyone seeks a support, something to fall back upon. Blessed is the man who has nothing to depend on.' One of the sadhus interrupted, 'I look upon that man as worthy of my worship who does not depend either on Vedic or on tantric

sadhana.' Swami Jagadananda immediately replied, 'I have given up both.'

On another occasion he said, 'Khoka Maharaj (Swami Subodhananda) said to me, "Why do you say that the world is unreal? The world may be unreal from your angle of vision; but it is not unreal from the angle of vision of God." Although Khoka Maharaj said so, I could never accept the world as real—for Thakur had said, "Brahman is real, the world unreal." In the Tantras the world is considered to be a vision of Shiva. Probably Khoka Maharaj referred to this.'

Apart from his spiritual attainments, Swami Jagadananda possessed many qualities of the head and heart that endeared him to all who came in contact with him. His nature was sweet. He seldom contradicted anybody except his students. In his talks, he had the patience and the courtesy to see the other person's viewpoint. He never criticized or condemned anybody. If ever he mentioned a wrong action of anybody, he scrupulously avoided mentioning the name of the person concerned. He never used such expressions as 'our house', 'our village', or 'my father'. In this he was an orthodox sannyasin. He would never bring one's attention down to the body by using such expressions as, 'you look very lean' or 'you have grown fat'.

He was neither too short nor too tall in stature and had a bright complexion. His brain was marvellously clear even in old age and he retained a very good memory. His face beamed with a rare smile. No one could talk with him for five minutes without noticing in his face the play of that exceptional smile. He was as simple as a child—and many a time he looked just like a child in spite of his age. One day he was standing on the lawn in front of the shrine when a stranger came up to him and asked what his name was. He immediately replied, 'My name is Jagadananda,' without at all enquiring who the man was or why he wanted to know his name. To the brahmacharin who was standing near him his words sounded like those of a boy of five.

He was never indifferent to what was going on around him. He evinced interest in the activities

of the Sevashrama. He was very happy to learn that the Sevashrama had been given possession of a new site by the government and would speak enthusiastically about the construction of the new hospital buildings. After reaching Vrindaban on 16 November 1951 he enquired about the details of a donation of Rs 40,000, which a Bombay donor had promised for the construction of a women's ward on the new site. The brahmacharin from whom he enquired about the matter wondered at the amount of interest that he, a sannyasin who seemingly kept himself aloof from all Mission activities, took in the continued progress and well-being of the institution.

He was kind to all. Once, on the eve of his departure for Almora, he went to the room of an ailing servant and took leave of him, as the servant was unable to come to him on account of illness. He loved to hear the radio news and regularly went through the newspapers with great interest. He kept himself well-informed about all political, social, and other activities both in India and abroad. He could not bear any criticism against the incumbent government. He would often say, 'People forget that it is their own government. Perfection cannot be attained in a day. Didn't we get freedom only the other day?'

The end came unexpectedly. The loss to the Order is great. His students—the sadhus and brahmacharins of the different centres of the Math and Mission who used to gather round him from far and near for the study of Vedanta—feel that a void has been created in their lives, a void that would never be possible to fill up again. They only pray that the sublime lessons of bhakti and jnana they learnt at his feet may continue to inspire them throughout their lives, and that their faith in the guru and the Shruti may never waver, for their revered and beloved teacher used to say: 'God comes to liberate humans in two forms—in the form of the guru and in the form of the Shruti. One is not different from the other. Both are forms of the same Atman. Without faith in these two, no one can have jnana.'



# The Poetic Philosophy of Ramcharitmanas

A P N Pankaj

(Continued from the previous issue)

RASA IS ONE OF THE TWENTY-FOUR GUṆAS, qualities, enumerated in the Vaisheshika philosophy. It is one of the most important components of *kāvya*. According to Vishwanatha, the author of the *Sahitya-darpana* (The Mirror of Literature), *rasa* is the soul of *kāvya*: ‘*Vākyam rasātmakam kāvyaṃ*; a sentence endowed with *rasa* is poetry.’ The *Agni Purana* says: ‘*Vāgvaidagdhya-pradhāne’pi rasa evātra jīvitam*; despite the pre-eminence of verbal dexterity, it is still *rasa* which is the soul of poetry.’<sup>15</sup>

There are, of course, schools or theories of poetics that are not based on *rasa*. Among these, the following are some of the more important: the *rīti* school, which accords greater importance to form, technique, and style; the *alaṅkāra* school, which emphasizes the primacy of figures of speech—similes, metaphors, and the like; and the *dhvani* school, which says that in poetry implied meaning is more important than the expressed meaning. It is evident that Tulsi, who has made appropriate application of different theories in his *Manas*, gives high importance to *rasa*, which is testified to by his placing the term *rasa* next to ‘words’ and ‘meanings’ in the opening invocatory shloka.

Bharata’s *Nāṭya-shāstra* (Dramatic Theory), the first extant systematic treatise on poetics, also says that no poetic meaning proceeds from speech without any kind of sentiment: ‘*Na hi rasād-ṛte kaścid-apy-arthaḥ pravartate*.’<sup>16</sup> Practically all schools accept the high importance of *rasa* in poetry. Bharata has enumerated eight *rasas*: *śṅgāra*, erotic; *hāsyā*, comic; *karuṇā*, pathetic; *raudra*, furious; *vīra*, heroic; *bhayaṇaka*, terrible; *bībhatsa*, odious; and *adbhuta*, marvellous (6.43–50). Subsequently, two more *rasas*—*śānta*, tranquil, and *vātsalya*, af-

fectionate—were added by Mammata and Vishwanatha respectively. However, *rasa* is just one; an indivisible indescribable experience that, depending upon the flux of the poet’s mind or the demand of the subject at hand, attains different hues technically called *bhāvas*, moods or emotions, and arouses different feelings.

As a poet, Tulsi has used all *rasas* and *bhāvas*, and in *Manas* he has played with them beautifully. But for him too there is only one *rasa*, and that is his *sthāhyī-bhāva*, durable mood. This *rasa* is bhakti, not as the eleventh *rasa* accepted by the poetic scholars after the so-called Bhakti Yuga of Hindi poetry, but as that indivisible, indescribable one *rasa* that the Upanishad refers to. While passing through the various events, episodes, and moods of *Manas*, Tulsi brings the relevant shades of *rasas* to bear upon them; but never is bhakti given a back seat. Bhakti drives *Manas*. We have already seen that all the seven chapters of this *mahākāvya* are pathways to bhakti. In the first of the two concluding Sanskrit verses of the ‘Uttarakanda’, the poet says that in the days of yore Bhagavan Shiva had composed this Ramayana in order to obtain unceasing bhakti to the lotus feet of Sri Rama:

*Yat-pūrvam prabhunā kṛtam sukavinā  
śrī-śambhunā durgamam;  
Śrīmad-rāma-padābhja-bhaktim-anisam  
prāptyai tu rāmāyaṇam.*

And the final statement is the *phala-śruti*, the fruit of reading or hearing *Manas*:

*Śrīmad-rāma-caritra-mānasam-idam  
bhaktyāvagāhanti ye;  
Te saṁsāra-pataṅga-ghora-kiraṇair-  
dahyanti no mānavāḥ.*



Vaishnavas

Those persons who devotedly delve deep into this *Ramcharitmanas* will not be burnt by the scorching sun of samsara.

### Chandas: Metre

Next in line is *chandas*, metre. Various metres have been described by Sanskrit prosodists.<sup>17</sup> Hindi has adopted several of them, taken some from other sources, and of course evolved some of its own. Though Sanskrit words abound in Tulsi's *Ramcharitmanas*, its main language is Avadhi-Hindi. It also contains words from Urdu, Persian, and various North Indian dialects, which were perhaps current in his time. For metres Tulsi has used *caupāi*, *dohā*, *sorathā*, and several other *chandas*. These had been used in Apabhramsha literature, and Malik Muhammad Jayasi used them in his *Padmavat* and other Hindi works before Tulsi. Tulsi's originality lies in the way he synchronized letters, words, syllables, lines, and metres to create a divine resonance that the mere singing of—without any musical instrument and sometimes even without understanding their meaning either—has the capacity to fill the entire ambience with melody, transporting the singer to celestial regions. Tulsi gave his language and metres such unprecedented popularity that people throughout India—the so-called Hindi belt in particular—rejoice in singing his compositions. His language and metres have by themselves become generators of *rasa*.

The phrase *chandasām-āpi* has an implicit mean-

ing too—*dhvani*, allusion. *Chandas* means 'Vedic hymns'. The poet prays that his work may attain the status of Vedic mantras. That his prayer has been fully answered is borne out by the large number of *Manas* verses being regarded as mantras—devotees claim that chanting them yields the results stated in these verse-mantras.

### Maṅgala: Felicity

What ought to flow from the above sequence of words, meanings, *rasas*, and metres? *Maṅgala*, says Tulsi. According to him, the soul of poetry is *maṅgala*, auspiciousness or benediction. And *maṅgala* is none other than Sri Rama himself: '*Bālamiki mana-ānandu bhārī; Maṅgala mūrati nayana nihārī; Valmiki's joy knew no bound on seeing with his eyes the embodiment of maṅgala*' (2.125,3). This word *maṅgala* is very dear to Tulsi and, either independently or with suffixes, he has used it over a hundred and thirty times in *Manas*, according to one count.<sup>18</sup> Statistics apart, the poet seeks *maṅgala* for the world and is sanguine that despite the failings that it may have, his poetry shall be *maṅgala-karani*, producer of goodness:

*Maṅgala-karani kali-mala-harani*  
*tulasī kathā raghunātha ki;*  
*Gati kūra kabitā sarita kī jyon*  
*sarita pāvani pāth kī.*  
*Prabhu sujasa saṁgati bhaniti bhali*  
*hoibi sujana mana bhāvani;*  
*Bhava aṅga bhūti masāna kī*  
*sumirata suhāvani pāvani.*

This story of Raghunatha is beneficent; it washes away the squalor of Kali Yuga. The tortuous movement of this uncouth river-like poem of mine is like the meandering Ganga of holy waters. In association with the Lord's glory, it will attain to goodness and be loved by saintly souls in the same way as the unholy ashes of the crematorium applied on Shiva's body are both charming and purificatory for those who think of them.<sup>19</sup>

'Shiva, along with Uma,' says the poet 'always repeats (the name of Rama) who is the abode of

felicity and destroyer of the unpropitious':

*Maṅgala-bhavana amaṅgala hārī;  
Umā sahita jehi japata purārī* (1.10.1).

*Maṅgala* is thus the ultimate purpose of *Manas*—*maṅgala* for the entire universe, in particular for those who sing with love Rama's glory captured in *Manas*. In essence, bhakti and *maṅgala* are identical, for both reside in Sri Rama's feet. There can be no *maṅgala* without bhakti, and *amaṅgala*, inauspiciousness, cannot even tread on the shadow of a bhakta. Remember Sri Rama with bhakti and you will have *maṅgala*. Everything worldly not associated with Sri Rama's name is *amaṅgala*. This is Tulsi's conviction.

According to some scholars, the word *maṅgala* is also used to convey the meanings 'progress', 'movement', 'advance', from the root *magi*: *gatau*. If one follows that meaning as well, Tulsi reposes all progress, spiritual and material, yoga and *kṣema*, in Sri Rama, the subject matter of *Manas*.

*Je sakāma nara sunahin je gāvahin;  
sukha sampati nānā bidhi pāvahin.  
Sura-durlabha sukha kari jaga māhīn;  
anta-kāla raghupati-pura jāhīn.  
Sunahin bimukta birata aru biṣāi;  
lahahin bhagati gati sampati nāi.*

Those who with worldly motives hear or sing it, will gain pleasure and prosperity of all sorts. In this world they will enjoy a happiness that is the envy of the gods. At the end (of their worldly existence), they will ascend to Raghupati's divine abode. The emancipated, the detached, and those attached to sense objects, will be blessed with bhakti, mukti, and ever-increasing prosperity (7.15.2–3).

### Vani and Vinayaka

For the appropriate use of words, meanings, *rasas*, metres, and for auspiciousness, Tulsi salutes Vani and Vinayaka and, as pointed out in the beginning, thereby follows the Indian poetic tradition. The terms *vāṇī* and *vināyaka* also have a *lakṣyārtha-dhvanīyārtha*, an implicit meaning. We shall consider that presently.

Swami Akhandananda Saraswati makes an important observation:

It is the tradition that those who are initiated into different sects—Vaishnava, Shakta, Saura, Shaiva, and the like—pay obeisance in the beginning to their Chosen Deities. Though Goswamiji's Chosen Deity is Sri Sita-Ramachandra, he has paid obeisance to Saraswati and Ganesha. This is *smārta* tradition. ... [In this] tradition followed by the devotees of Ayodhya they pay obeisance to all, but seek devotion to Rama as boon. Therefore, in his *Vinaya Patrika* also, after having saluted Ganapati in the beginning—'Gaiye Ganapati Jagabandana'—Goswami Tulsidas has concluded this hymn by saying, '*Māṅgata tulasidāsa kara jore / Basahin rāma-siya mānasa more*'; Tulsidas begs with folded hands that Sri Sita-Ramachandra may abide in my heart.'<sup>20</sup>

While enumerating the schools of poetics, we had made mention of the *dhvani* school and have subsequently alluded to the *dhvani* form a couple of times. Essentially, *dhvani* is 'the non-literal power of language'.<sup>21</sup> 'In good *kāvya* too there should be, as it were, *dhvani*, "sound" of such kind that it can carry all the meanings, including the figurative and indirect. Anandavardhana [a proponent of Dhvani school] uses the term *dhvani* ... to mean that which carries those excellences ... so that it comes to mean the power which underlies suggestion or "implication"' (98).

The *vācyārtha*, direct meaning, of the terms *vāṇī* and *vināyaka* mentioned by the poet in this *maṅgalācarana* is, of course, Saraswati and Ganesha. According to Swami Prajnanananda Saraswati, a scholar saint of Maharashtra who spent a lifetime in the study of *Ramcharitmanas* and has written in Hindi a monumental seven-volume commentary on this text, *vāṇī* and *vināyaka* have distinct implied meanings. We have already stated that apart from paying obeisance to God or the deities, one of the customary objectives of invocation is to introduce the subject of the poem. Tulsi, in this *maṅgalācarana*, not only pays obeisance to his *iṣṭadevas* implicitly but also introduces them as his subject.



Are Vani and Vinayaka the creators of *varṇa-saṅghas*, *artha-saṅghas*, *rasas*, *chandas*, and *maṅgalas*? Swami Prajnanananda argues as follows:<sup>22</sup>

(i) In this shloka, Tulsi reverences Sri Sita-Rama with the words *vāṇī* and *vināyaka*. The use of the *dvandva* compound, both in the adjective *kartārau* and the noun *vāṇīvināyakau*, clearly indicates their dual character. If we consider this, then Vani-Saraswati and Vinayaka-Ganapati would have to be considered a pair, a couple, thereby parenting *varṇas*, *arthas*, and so on. The process of creation assumes *dāmpatya*, the relationship that exists between Shakti and Shaktiman, Prakriti and Purusha. This is untenable in this instance.

(ii) From the internal evidence of *Manas*, nowhere is it observed that Vani-Ganapati are the producers of *varṇa-artha saṅghas*, whereas Sri Sita-Ramachandra—who were likened to *girā* and *artha*, *jala* and *vīci* earlier—have been referred to as such in several instances:

*Sārada dāru-nāri sama svāmī;  
rāmu sūtra-dhara antara-jāmī.  
Jehi para kṛpā karahin janū jānī;  
kabi ura ajira nacāvahin bānī.*

Saraswati is like a puppet and the indwelling Rama the thread-holding director. He makes her dance in the heart of a poet on whom he showers his grace, considering him his servitor.<sup>23</sup>

Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana, Jamini Roy, Bengal Patachitra style



*Tadapi jathāśruta kahaun bakhānī;  
sumiri girāpati prabhu dhanupānī.*

Even so I shall speak in detail what I have heard, after meditating upon the Master of Speech, (and) the Lord (Ramachandra) who holds a bow in his hand (1.105.2).

*Byāpaka brahma biraja bāgīsā;  
māyā moha pāra paramisā.*

(Sri Rama is) the One, all-pervading Brahman, without passion, Lord of Speech, the Supreme God beyond illusion and infatuation (7.58.4).

Such adjectives can also be found in *Vinaya Patrika* and the other works of Goswamiji. They prove that Sri Rama is none other than the lord and master of speech.

(iii) Similarly, there are examples to prove that the etymological expressions ‘*vināyaka vigataḥ nāyako niyantāśya*’; Vinayaka is one who has no superior, controller, or ruler; or alternatively ‘*vighna-nāyaka nāśako vā*, the controller or destroyer of obstacles’, also pertain to Sri Rama:

*Parama svatantra na sira para koī.*

(You are) supremely independent with none superior to you (1.137.1).

*Sakala bighna byāpahin nahin tehi;  
rāma sukrpā bilokahin jehī.*

None of the obstacles can consume him upon whom Rama casts his gracious glance (1.39.3).

(iv) In this *maṅgalacaraṇa* shloka, the poet has also suggested, by stating that they are *maṅgalānām kartārau*, the architects of felicity—that Sri Sita-Ramachandra are the subjects of his *mahākāvya*. *Kartārau*—this *maṅgala-kartṛtva*, the dispensation of *maṅgala*—is indeed nothing but *raghunātha-gāthā*, the story of Rama, which Tulsi, for the joy of his heart, is going to narrate: *svāntah-sukhāya tulasī raghunātha-gāthā* (1. invocatory verse 7).

The third purport of *maṅgalācaraṇa* is to bless the audience or the reader. Tulsi’s humility does not permit him to

make such a statement right at the beginning of his *Manas*. He, however, does so only a little later; but while doing so, he attributes these blessings to Shiva and Parvati:

*Je ehi kathahi saneha sametā;  
kahiabin sunibahin samujhi sacetā.  
Hoihibahin rāma-carana anurāgī;  
kali-mala rahita sumanāgala bhāgī.  
Sapanehun sācehu mohi para jaun  
hara-gauri pasāu;  
Tau phura hou jo kaheun saba  
bhāṣā bhaniti prabhāu.*

Those who narrate or listen to this story with love and understanding will become lovers of Rama's feet, cleansed of the squalor of (this) Kali Yuga, and sharers in the divine benediction (1.15.5–6). If even in my dream Shiva and Parvati are truly pleased with me, then may the impact of my vernacular composition bear the truth as stated above by me (1.15.10).

(To be concluded)

## Notes and References

15. *Agni Purana*, 337.33; cited in Mukunda Madhava Sharma, *The Dhvani Theory in Sanskrit Poetry* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Amarabharati, 1968), 7.
16. Bharata Muni, *Natya-shastra*, 6.34.
17. See V S Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 1035–42.
18. Winand M Callewaert and Philip Lutgendorf, *Rāmacaritmānas Word Index* (New Delhi: Mahohar, 1997), 241.
19. *Ramcharitmanas*, 1.10.
20. Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, *Sri Ramacharita-manasa Pravachana* (Mumbai: Satsahitya Prakashan, 1999), 1.1; translation mine.
21. A K Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 1.99.
22. See Dandi Swami Prajnanananda Saraswati, *Sri Ramcharitmanas Gudhartha Chandrika Tika*, 7 vols (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, Samvat 2057), 1.2–6. I have summed up, with some examples given therein, the author's detailed arguments.
23. *Ramcharitmanas*, 1.105.3.

(Continued from page 376)

The *Vijay Tantra* explains the esoteric meaning of *mudrā* thus:

*Sat-saṅgena bhaven-muktir-  
asat-saṅgena bandhanam;  
Asat-saṅga-mudraṇam yat-tu  
tan-mudrā parikīrtitā.*

The company of the good leads to liberation and evil company to bondage; closure of evil company is termed *mudrā*.

The term *maithuna* literally means 'union' or 'intercourse'. In tantra it symbolizes the need for the sadhaka to bring about the union of the kundalini—lying coiled up in the *mulādhāra cakra*—with Shiva, who is stationed in the *sahasrāra*. The kundalini has to be aroused from its slumber, brought up through the *suṣumnā* channel, and finally merged with Shiva in order that the sadhaka can experience ecstatic delight.

*Idā-pīṅgalayoh prāṇān suṣumnāyām pravartayet;  
Suṣumnā śaktir-uddiṣṭā jīvo'yam parah śivah.  
Tayostu saṁgame devaiḥ surataṁ nāma kīrtitam.*

Coax the *prāṇa* into the *suṣumnā* channel from its course in the *idā* and *pīṅgalā*. The jiva identified with the power that flows within the *suṣumnā* is none other than Shiva. Their union has been termed 'intercourse' by the gods.

When sadhakas understand the inner significance of these practices and perform their sadhana accordingly, under the strict supervision of their guru, they succeed in reaching the ultimate goal.

We are all aware of the influence the tantras have exercised on Indian religious life in the post-Vedic periods. This is clear from the widespread use of *bija-mantras*, *mudrās*, and rites like *bhūta-suddhi*, *aṅga-nyāsa*, and the like as part of purification procedures for the sadhaka's physical body. There is no denying the fact that the tantras are an integral part of Hindu life, whether we like them or not. A deeper understanding of their symbolism and methodology would help us enrich our spiritual lives.



# Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 23. Nigṛhīṭasya manasaḥ śravaṇāḍau tad-anuṅa-viṣaye ca samādhīḥ—samādhānam.

*Samādhāna is the constant concentration of the mind, thus restrained, on hearing of scriptural passages and other virtues that are conducive to these.*

ALL YOUR MENTAL VIBRATIONS should be directed towards God. Hence, the author says: *tad-anuṅa-viṣaye*. But when you meditate, the mind remains on God for two minutes only. After that it starts roaming in the market, repairing the table lamp, talking to so and so, quarrelling with somebody, and the like. This is *tad-viṅa*, opposed to that. Such meditation even for two hours will not do. All these currents of the mind must be turned towards God. Think of God with the help of whatever you read or hear about him.

## 24. Gurūpadiṣṭa-vedānta-vākyeṣu viśvāsaḥ—śraddhā.

*Śraddhā is faith in the truths of Vedanta as taught by the guru.*

This does not mean mere curiosity, or even respect, which is just a social etiquette. Someone tells something and you believe it—that is not *śraddhā*, which means accepting the words of the guru. Respecting the position of, say, the president of the Order is merely etiquette.

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The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

## 25. Mumukṣutva—mukṣecchā.

*Mumukṣutva is the yearning for spiritual freedom.*

All these spiritual practices will be effective if you have real hunger for realization. Just observe and find out how much hunger you have for God, for liberation, and how much for worldly and heavenly pleasures. Find out how much time you devote to each one of these. Then, you will find that out of the twenty-four hours, your mind is engaged in 'lust and gold' for twenty-three hours, and you spend with great difficulty only one hour for God, and that includes all your meditation, classes, and other spiritual practices. Besides, there are breaks even in these—for marketing and other activities. This will not do.

Sadananda says that all these means will be successful if there is love for the ideal; otherwise all this effort will last only a few days. If you have intense attachment for the purpose of life, then control and the proper means will come automatically. It must be remembered that all these four must be there. It will not do to have only *viveka* or only *vairāgya*. If there is only *viveka*, life will become merely intellectual. If there is only *vairāgya*, life will be emotional. Practice of *śamādi* will be absolutely unsuccessful if there is no *viveka* and *vairāgya*. Give up *karma-janya-śubha*, good effect of works, by discerning that they will always be reactionary in nature, always changing, dependant, giving only temporary happiness.

## 26. Evambhūtaḥ pramātādhikārī 'śānto dānta' ityādi-śruteḥ. Uktañca: 'Prāśānta- cittāya jitendriyāya ca prahīṇa-doṣāya yathokta-kāriṇe; guṇānvitāyānugatāya sarvadā pradeyam-etat satatam mumukṣave' iti.

*Such an aspirant is a qualified student; for it is said in the Shruti passage 'quiet, subdued' (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.23). It is further said, 'This is always to be taught to one who is of tranquil mind, who has subjugated his senses, who is free from faults, obedient, endowed with virtues, always submissive, and who is constantly eager for liberation' (Upadesha-Sahasri, 324.16.72).*

In this aphorism Sadananda is quoting the authorities. He has already said what he had to, and now he is quoting the words of the prophet. In his works, Shankaracharya first says logically and rationally whatever he has to say and later quotes the scriptures and revelations of realized souls. Here Sadananda too is quoting the words of Shankaracharya in support of his statement.

There is a definite rule regarding who should be given spiritual instructions: (i) the person must be psychologically fit; (ii) with a peaceful mind, *śānta*; (iii) with senses under control, *jitendriya*—Vedanta will not be effective if taught to a person in whom worldly desires are bubbling; and (iv) who is obedient. On the one hand you study and listen to scriptures, but at the time of practice in actual life you become a rationalist and follow your own logic. This will not do. Hence, the disciple must be ready to act according to the instructions given; obedience is required. Finally, (v) the person must have love and devotion to the guru, otherwise he will not practise his teachings.

Now, the second *anubandha* is being described. There are four *anubandhas*, preliminary questions about the text, which are interrelated to each other: The competence of the student, the subject matter, its connection with the book, and the necessity of its study. So far the *adbhikārin*, the competent student, was described. Next, Sadananda is taking up 'the subject matter'.

**27. Viśayaḥ—jīva-brahmaikyam śuddha-caitanyam prameyam tatra eva vedāntānām tātpariyāt.**

*The subject matter is the identity of the*

*individual self and Brahman, which is of the nature of pure intelligence, and is to be realized, for such is the purport of Vedanta texts.*

In spiritual life you have to think according to the theme of the scriptures, which is unity of the individual soul and Brahman. The thing to be realized is called *prameya*. There is no *jiva* or *jagat*, world. All is nothing but Brahman, the pure Consciousness. God alone is manifested in various forms. This is the theme of Vedanta. Try to understand the Shastras in this line.

For example, the scriptures speak of the four castes: *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, and *shudra*. The purpose of doing so is for the spiritual evolution of the individual. There cannot be such a division into castes eternally. If it is there, it will contradict the very Shastras, which state that karma is for *citta-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, and then for God-realization—and that this division into castes is for karma. Similarly, you must connect worship, social service, and the like with the subject matter. However voluminous the scripture might be, the theme is only this: Brahman and *jiva* are one, the world is not. By worship and social service, when one becomes unselfish, one realizes the unity of Brahman and the *jiva*.

**28. Sambandhastu—tad-aikya-prameyasya tat-pratipādakopaniṣat-pramāṇasya ca bodhya-bodhaka-bhāvaḥ.**

*The connection is the relation between that identity which is to be realized and the evidence of the Upanishads that establishes it, as between a thing to be known and that which tells of it.*

All the various types of spiritual practices must be related psychologically to the actual subject matter. They should be understood in such a way that the real theme of the scriptures—that Brahman alone is real and the world is unreal—should flash within you. This is called *bodhya-bodhaka-bhāva*.

In the scriptures there are certain statements apparently contradictory, so also our works and

activities appear to be contradictory to the subject matter, which is God-realization. But these also ultimately lead to the same goal. This is *sambandha*.

**29. Prayojanam tu—tad-aikya-prameya-gatājñāna-nivṛttiḥ svasvarūpānandāvāptiśca ‘tarati śokam ātmavit’ ityādi-śruteḥ ‘brahma vid brahmaiva bhavati’ ityādi-śruteśca.**

*The necessity of this study is the dispelling of the ignorance related to that identity which is to be realized, as the attainment of bliss resulting from the realization of one’s own Self. As is stated in Shruti passages like ‘The knower of the Self overcomes grief’ (Chhandogya Upanishad, 7.1.3), and ‘He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman’ (Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.9).*

To the extent the purpose of the scriptures is clear and strong, to that very extent there will be dynamic sincerity in our spiritual practices. The purpose is *ajñāna-nivṛtti*, removal of ignorance, and also obtaining supreme bliss. If one goes towards the world, towards lust and gold, towards name and fame, it will be *ajñāna-pravṛtti*, indulgence in ignorance. This will lead to misery and not to *paramānanda*, supreme bliss. The scriptures declare that the knower of Self transcends all suffering: *tarati śokam ātmavit*. A monastic life without a clear concept of this ultimate goal is of no use. It gets reduced to the life of a vagabond, a life of mere wandering from place to place.

**30. Ayam-adhikāri janana-maraṇādi-saṁsārānala-santapto dipta-śirā jalarāśim-ivopahārapāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭhaṁ gurum-upasṛtya tam-anusarati ‘tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum-evābhigacchet samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭhaṁ’ ityādi-śruteḥ.**

*Such a qualified pupil scorched by the fire of an endless round of birth, death, and the like, should hasten—just as one with head on fire rushes to a lake—with presents in hand, to a guru learned in the Vedas and always*

*living in Brahman, and serve him. As the following and other Shrutis say: ‘Let him, in order to understand this, approach with fuel in his hand a spiritual guide who is learned in the Vedas and lives entirely in Brahman’ (Mundaka Upanishad, 1.2.12).*

Here Sadananda says that if you are hungry for realization, if the aim shines before you, then you will be successful. Just as a person scorched by the heat of the sun runs hither and thither for water, similarly when the aspirant is scorched by worldly sufferings the world appears like a burning fire on the head, and then he seeks God—‘Where is He?’ Thus searching, he will get him. If he is easy-going and relishes objects of the world, then he will not get God. Feel from the heart that the world is painful, and then *vairāgya* and all other virtues will come by themselves. Purify yourself by following the required preliminaries and approach the guru with a burning heart. You cannot live the spiritual life according to your own whims and fancies. You consider yourself too intelligent. Ordinary reason is constantly changing. Take for example the Nobel Prize. ‘A’ proposes a theory and gets the Nobel Prize. After fifty years ‘B’ works on the same problem, A’s theory is discarded and B’s new theory is accepted; and ‘B’ too gets the Nobel Prize. See, how dubious is reason. It is never constant.

The guru must be a practical guide and an illumined soul. ‘Wood in hand’ is a mark of respect, not that the guru is in need of wood. The instructions of the guru must be in accordance with the spirit of the Shastras. The knowledge of Brahman cannot be obtained by means of some external habits—humility, politeness, not harming others, and the like. These are ethical values. For spiritual life, illumination is required. Hence, a guru is required.

**31. Sa guruḥ parama-kṛpayādhyāropāpavādanāyānainam-upadiśati ‘tasmai sa vidvān-upasannāya samyak praśānta-cittāya śamānvitāya; yenākṣaram puruṣam veda satyaṁ provāca tām tattvato brahma-vidyām’ ityādi-śruteḥ.**

*Such a guru, through his infinite grace, instructs the pupil by the method of apavāda, de-superimposition, of adhyāropa, superimposition, as is described in Shruti passages like 'To that pupil—who has approached him with due courtesy, whose mind has become perfectly calm, and who has control over his senses—the wise teacher should truly impart that knowledge of Brahman through which he knows the Being, imperishable and real' (Mundaka Upanishad, 1.2.13).*

Once the preliminary process of psychological purification is over, what type of thinking should there be in the aspirant? This is being explained. The

guru will give this teaching to a qualified aspirant, not to others. Sri Ramakrishna used to open his mouth after assessing the competence of aspirants.

Illumination removes the mental superimposition. Actually, there is a rope, but we see a snake. Similarly, there is only Brahman, but we are seeing rivers, mountains, forests, human beings, ourselves, and so forth. This is mental superimposition, which has covered Reality. To remove the superimposition through knowledge, psychologically not physically, is called *apavāda*, de-superimposition. Bring this conviction in your life: that father, mother, man, woman, and all are my own superimpositions due to ignorance.

(To be continued)

(Continued from page 379)

A verse from the 'Devi Mahatmyam', a part of the *Markandeya Purana*, gives a vivid image of Devi Kalika:

*Bhrukuṭi-kuṭilāt-tasyā lalāṭa-phalakād-dyutam;  
Kālī karāla-vadanā viniṣkrāntāsipāśinī.  
Vicitra-khaṭvāṅga-dharā nara-mālā-vibhūṣaṇā;  
Dvīpi-carma-paridhānā śuṣka-māmsātibhairavā.  
Ati-vistāra-vadanā jihvā-lalana-bhīṣaṇā;  
Nimagnārakta-nayanā nādāpūrita-dīn-mukhā.*

Kali, born of Devi Ambika's brows, has a face terrible to look at; she carries in her hands a scimitar, a noose, and diverse skeletal remains and is bedecked with a garland of human heads; her frightful frame, with flesh all but dried up, is clad in tiger-skin. Her widely gaping mouth is made all the more dreadful by a lolling tongue, (and she inspires awe with her) deep-seated red eyes and frightening roar filling the skies.

*Śuddha-vidyā*, in the context of the tantras, means self-reflective consciousness. It is associated with *prakāśa*, consciousness, as *vimarśa*, reflection. She is one with the supreme Self. Purity of her reflection in the human being is attained by means of *sat-tarka*, right reasoning. This 'right

reasoning' is in reality a higher form of intuition. It first clarifies the *vikalpas*, evolute of Prakriti, and when it reaches a high degree of purity, it is transformed into *śuddha-vidyā*. It is the nature of *śuddha-vidyā* to reveal Reality, which is none other than *vimarśa*, self-reflective Consciousness. It is through this power that the yogi becomes adept in all Shastras.

Kali is viewed in multifarious ways. But it should always be kept in mind that her real nature is *samvit*, Consciousness. Thus, though the *varṇas*, phonemes, are in reality *samvit*, they are utilized in rituals as *vāg-devatā*, the deity of speech, when the worshipper is engaged in meditation. When oblations are being offered during *havana*, the fire sacrifice, the Devi is seen as *vāg-īshvarī*, the master of speech who gives birth to fire. During *pūrṇābhuti*, the final oblation, the two ladles are viewed as representing Shiva and Shakti. Only when this consciousness is kept bright in the worshipper's mind does he become *prabuddha*, awakened, and attain true fulfilment. The *Spanda Karika* has the following exhortation: '*Prabuddha sarvadā tiṣṭhet*; be established in awareness at all times.'



# Mahendranath Gupta: From Death to Immortality

Swami Chetanananda

**D**EATH IS THE ONLY CERTAIN THING in this uncertain world. Union must always end in separation. The wheel of life and death is continually rotating and Time—Maha-kala—is the controller of that wheel. There is none dear or hateful to Time; it is impartial to all.

After seventy-eight years, M realized that he needed to prepare to depart from the world stage; his performance in the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna was nearing its end. He was extremely happy that he had acted in his role very well and was satisfied that he would be remembered throughout the ages. In truth, although Time devours everything, it will never be able to touch the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, M's immortal work.

## Sri Ramakrishna's Light

A true lover always enjoys talking about or listening to his or her beloved. M's life is a glowing example of a true lover and devotee of his beloved Master. One day, in an inspired mood, he was trying to describe Sri Ramakrishna. He said:

The Master was like a five-year-old boy always running to meet his Mother.

The Master was like a beautiful flower whose nature is to bloom and spread its fragrance.

The Master was like a bonfire from which other lamps are lighted.

The Master was like a celestial vina always absorbed in singing the glory of the Divine Mother.

The Master was like a big fish joyfully swimming in calm, clear, blue waters, the Ocean of Satchidananda.

The Master was like a bird which had lost its nest in a storm and then, perched on the threshold

of the Infinite, was joyfully moving between the two realms, singing the glory of the Infinite.

After trying to describe the Master in many ways, he said that all these similes were inadequate. The Infinite cannot be expressed in words.<sup>1</sup>

Tulsidas said: 'Without holy company, there is no talk about God; without talk about God, there is no chance of getting rid of delusion; and without getting rid of delusion, there is no possibility of seeing God.'

During one such discussion, on the evening of 20 June 1931, M quoted from the Bhagavadgita: 'For a sage who wants to attain yoga, action is said to be the means; but when he has attained yoga, serenity is said to be the means.'<sup>2</sup> He then explained the mystery of karma to the assembled devotees: 'Krishna also described the secret of work thus: "*mam-anusmara yuddhya cha*; remember me and fight." This is called karma yoga: unite yourself with the Lord through karma. First think of him, then work, and again think of him and offer the fruit to him. This is karma yoga.'<sup>3</sup>

M continued: 'Swamiji was a hero. Look at his life: He attained samadhi, then performed action, and again he remained in samadhi. He had no attachment for action. He was commanded to perform his divine mission—working for the welfare of humanity. Work is not the goal—it is the means to realize God.'

Excitedly, M said: 'What a great hero! How boldly he proclaimed, "I will tear up the net of maya!"'

Upon saying this, M got up and went to his room, as if he were about to tear up his own maya.



When the monks and devotees entered the room, they found M in excruciating pain: his right hand, with which he had written the five volumes of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* [the original Bengali *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*], was hurting terribly. Swami Nityatmananda warmed a salt bag on top of a hurricane lantern and pressed it on the damaged nerves. His son and grandsons rushed to him. At 11.00 p.m. Dr Durgapada Ghosh arrived and gave him a medicine to alleviate the pain. M then fell asleep at midnight. Hearing about M's condition, Swami Shivananda remarked: 'This time M's life has been saved by God's grace' (15.357).

Swami Raghavananda recalled:

Three months before the finale, M came to humbler rooms in 13/2, Guruprasad Choudhury Lane, to pass his days in the midst of Bhaktas and Sadhus, personally attending to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, conducted in this place for the last 40 years. Here he lived as before, but still more abstemiously—cooking his own simple Havishya food, doing all his things with his own hands, and writing the fifth part of the *Kathamrita* which he had taken in hand in January [1932] last. He looked more tired than before, but his nerve-spasms, though frequent, were not so acute now. His enthusiasm for Bhaktas and love for talking about God were unabated; they rather increased. His face wore a greater brightness. When he would dictate the *Kathamrita*, Part V (now published) from his Diary, many would cluster around him to listen to his words. Sometimes he would get up at [the] dead of night, say to any Bhakta to be found nearby, 'Let us listen to the words of the Master in the depth of night as he explains the truth of the Pranava,' and the dictation and writing of the book would proceed for more than an hour. This happened once also three or four days before the end.

There were discourses every morning and evening. In the morning he would get up and sit in the shrine in deep meditation—the eyes half-closed and the beautiful face beaming with heavenly light. Then he would sing some songs, the sweet refrain and tune of which still linger and haunt our mind[s]. Every evening he would come up, take his accustomed seat on the roof, listen to the even-song, and bow down to the Lord; some-

times he would talk to the assembled Bhaktas and sometimes listen to the hymns, sung by the Bhaktas after Aratrika [vesper]. Sometimes he would request some particular hymns to be sung.

A few days before his passing away a Bhakta was singing some song, the tune of which he heard from his room below. This was a song of the devotees of Nuddea [Nadia] bewailing the departure of Sri Chaitanya previous to his Sannyas. M called the singer to his room and had the song sung in his presence. But he fell into deep meditateness and asked the singer to retire. Alas, the song cruelly proved prophetic of the finale!

Some time ago, when one of the Bhaktas [probably Raghavananda, who was then living with M] was meditating in front of the shrine, all at once he saw a vision: He saw M in leisurely gait was mounting [to] a very elevated position and from there trying to jump into the Infinite Vastness; at this he [the devotee] started up and catching him said, 'Where are you going?' He narrated this to other Bhaktas, but all in fun, [and he] made light of it, thinking that the end would not be so near.<sup>4</sup>

### Light beyond Pain

Although M had been suffering from that neuralgic pain in his hand over a period of eight months, he continued to give final shape to the last volume of the *Kathamrita*. On 8 May 1932 Nityatmananda visited M at Thakur Bari, 'the Master's house', and noticed his broken health. M was having milk and bread for his supper. A devotee was heating the salt bag on top of a hurricane lantern; M then pressed it to his right elbow with his left hand. Sometimes the pain would start just when M began a writing session on the *Kathamrita*. When his attendant would ask him to rest, M would say: 'I forget pain when I meditate on the words of the Master. It transports my mind into bliss.'<sup>5</sup>

Despite his ill health, every afternoon many visitors would come to M to listen to his inspiring talk and reminiscences of the Master. On 14 May 1932 M was working on the fifth volume of the *Kathamrita*, so the devotees were waiting for him on the roof adjacent to the shrine. When he had finished writing, Nityatmananda entered the room.



He was alarmed by M's emaciated condition. When he expressed his concern, M replied: 'The human body decays and dies at the end—this is an eternal law. The one who is within this body—Satchidananda—is alone free from disease and death. As long as one has a body, one will have to undergo misery. Having this knowledge a devotee should stay in this world. The Master said: 'Tie the non-dual knowledge in the corner of your cloth and then do as you please in this world.'

Nityatmananda: 'It is almost dark and you are still writing!'

M: 'Yes, I was really enjoying myself. A fish was taken out of the water and it was about to die; all of a sudden it jumped into the water and swam away. While writing the *Kathamrita*, I forgot my excruciating pain.'

M then attended the vesper service in the shrine.

On 15 May 1932 M supervised some plastering and painting work done on Thakur Bari. He never claimed ownership of his own house. He sensed his days were numbered, so he worked quickly to finish his duties. People around him wondered at his tremendous energy and willpower. It is said that a dying swan sings a song. During this time, Nityatmananda heard M singing the following song of Ramprasad:

I have surrendered my soul at  
the fearless feet of the Mother;  
Am I afraid of Death anymore?  
Unto the tuft of hair on my head  
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kali's name.  
My body I have sold in  
the marketplace of the world  
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.

Deep within my heart I have planted  
the name of Kali,  
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;  
When Yama, King of Death, appears,  
To him I shall open my heart and  
show it hanging there.  
I have cast out from me my six unflinching foes;  
Ready am I to sail life's sea,  
Crying, "To Durga, victory!"<sup>6</sup>

M said: 'The Master told me that I would have to do a little work for the Divine Mother. I have been doing that work for the last fifty years, yet she is still not giving me any leave.' M passed away twenty-one days later.

### Light at the End

On the afternoon of 25 May 1932 M was in his room on the second floor of Thakur Bari. He decided to finish the last appendix of the fifth volume of the *Kathamrita*, so he opened his diary to the entry describing the Brahmo festival at Simulia in Jnan Chaudhury's house, dated 1 January 1882 (18 Paus 1288 BE). M had not been present on that occasion, but he had collected a description of the day's events from Manomohan Mitra. Nityatmananda was with M, and he was amazed by M's God-given memory and writing ability, and by how he could develop the scene and complete the dialogue with only brief and cryptic notes. He felt that M had become one with the Master, and he was writing what was appearing in his pure mind. Nityatmananda noticed that M wrote four pages of the finished description from one and a quarter pages of the diary.

All of a sudden the pain in M's arm became acute, and he lay down on the bed. Nityatmananda fanned him, then gave him a piece of rock candy and a glass of water. Slowly the pain subsided and he went to the shrine to attend the vesper service. Afterwards he sat on the roof and met with the devotees. At 9.30 p.m. M took his supper.

M lived in two places. Sometimes he stayed in the attic room on the fourth floor of the Morton Institution at 50 Amherst Street. His wife and children lived on the third floor of that building. At other times he lived in Thakur Bari, his ancestral home at 13/2 Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane. When he stayed in Thakur Bari, M prepared his own food. His menu consisted of rice, a boiled potato, one boiled *patal* [a kind of vegetable], boiled mung dal with a little turmeric and salt, and milk and rice for dessert. He ate his lunch at 10.00 a.m. and then rested. Even in his old age, M was very independent and did not allow others to serve him. He made his

own bed and attended to all of his personal tasks.

On the afternoon of 26 May 1932 M continued his work on the *Kathamrita*, ignoring his pain. That evening he attended the vesper service in the shrine of Thakur Bari. He suffered from excruciating pain that night.

The next morning M insisted on removing the rubbish that had been left behind by the masons working on his bathroom in Thakur Bari. Nityatmananda tried to stop him, but M paid no heed.

After lunch M dictated to Satinath the chronology of the *Kathamrita*, which was added in the fifth volume. While dictating, M remarked: 'These incidents took place forty-nine years ago. It seems to me that they happened yesterday. What a deep impression the Master left in our minds!'<sup>7</sup>

Afterwards Nityatmananda told M: 'It is not possible to practise japa and meditation all the time. So, I am thinking of visiting the places sanctified by the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna.'

M joyfully gave his permission and said: 'That is a wonderful project. Finish it soon.'

Nityatmananda asked: 'I need your blessing and guidance. Where shall I start?'

M suggested that he begin in central Calcutta, where the Master first lived when he moved from Kamarpukur in 1852. M mentioned eighty-five places in Calcutta and Dakshineswar as well as on the west bank of the Ganga. Nityatmananda visited those places connected with Sri Ramakrishna and reported to M every day. Thus, M could mentally revisit those places associated with the Master and get immense joy.

One day Nityatmananda went to visit the Chaitanya Sabha at Kolutola, where he met Kunja Mallick, who recounted his encounter with Sri Ramakrishna:

I was then sixteen years old. One day Mani Mallick asked me to go with him to Dakshineswar to see a holy man. Mani Mallick was a friend of my grandfather. When I went to Dakshineswar, the Master gave me some sweets to eat, and another day he fed me a sandesh. Despite receiving his affection, I have achieved nothing. (He started crying.)

A few things I recall about the Master: His childlike behaviour, blissful mood, and unearthly love. I have never experienced such love in my life.

I vividly remember these two incidents: One afternoon I went to him in Dakshineswar and he was about to go to Calcutta to see Girish Chandra's *Chaitanya Lila*. Seeing me he said: 'You have come. Very well. I shall leave now.' Saying so, he took a sweet from the cabinet and gave it to me, and blessed me while putting his hand on my head. I was overwhelmed with joy.

Another day Narendra was singing on the floor of the Master's room and he was seated on his small cot, immersed in samadhi. When he regained outer consciousness, he came down and sat on the floor near the south-eastern door. Moved to tears, Narendra touched his head to the feet of the Master (15.421-2).

In the early morning of 28 May 1932 M went for a walk. When he returned at 6.00 a.m. Nityatmananda asked him, 'Why did you go alone?' M replied: 'I feel nervous if I do not walk. Perhaps I won't be able to move anymore.' M then went to the third floor and read the page proofs of chapters thirteen and fourteen of volume five of the *Kathamrita*. He made some additions, altered some sections, and then gave the pages to Nityatmananda, who carried them to the Sudha Press. Sri Ramakrishna had asked M to work for the Divine Mother, and he did so for fifty years. Even though his health was delicate, he never gave up.

(To be concluded)

## References

1. Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived with God* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 226.
2. Bhagavadgita, 6.3.
3. Swami Nityatmananda, *Srima Darshan* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 1974), 15.355.
4. Swami Raghavananda, 'Mahendra Nath Gupta', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 37/10 (October 1932), 500-1.
5. *Srima Darshan*, 15.363.
6. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 302.
7. *Srima Darshan*, 15.416.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **Vivekanandar Illam: Vivekananda House**

Ed. Swami Atmashraddhananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai  
600 004. 2009. Website: [sriramakrishna-math.org](http://sriramakrishna-math.org). viii + 248 pp. Rs 200.

Each of the five sections of this 'pilgrim-book' is a *tirtha* one would not feel like leaving in a hurry. The first section displays monuments and memorials dedicated to Swami Vivekananda in India and the US, with a full chapter devoted to Tamil Nadu. The second section deals with Swamiji's visit to Madras and his nine days stay at Castle Kernan—renamed by the government of Tamil Nadu as Vivekanandar Illam (*illam* means house in Tamil) in 1997. The third narrates the early history of the castle, the eleven years of Swami Ramakrishnananda's presence there—when the castle served as the first centre of the Ramakrishna movement in South India—and the visits of other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, monks, and eminent persons. The fourth section briefly recounts the uses the castle was put to between 1907 and 1993, and the remodelling it underwent under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission after this period. The last section presents an architectural study of the Illam and explains its present activities and the permanent exhibition it houses.

The thoughtful conception and structure of the book as well as the painstaking and thorough research it has necessitated—all done by Swami Atmashraddhananda, present editor of *Vedanta Kesari*, and his team—is reflected in each of its eighteen chapters and twelve most informative appendices. The sober but gracious design, large typeface, and copious historical and recent images, enhance the value of a presentation that is mounted on high quality art paper. It deserves to be highlighted that a book measuring 22 x 28.5 cm and weighing 1.3 kg is offered to the public at a nominal price, thanks to the generous subsidies of a few institutions, mainly from Chennai. This volume would find pride of a place in any personal or public library.

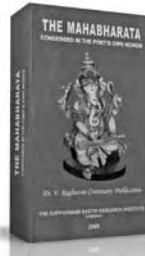
PB



## **Srimad Bhagavata— Condensed in the Poet's Own Words**

Pandit A M Srinivasachariar;  
trans. Dr V Raghavan

Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute,  
Chennai 600 004. 2008. xxxii + 444 pp.  
Rs 200.



## **The Mahabharata— Condensed in the Poet's Own Words**

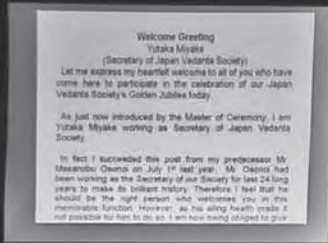
Pandit A M Srinivasachariar;  
trans. Dr V Raghavan

Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute.  
2008. xxxii + 470 pp. Rs 200.

The Mahabharata and the Bhagavata contain almost all the wisdom essential for everyday living. However, their huge size is a deterrent to their study. If only someone could cull the essence of these epics without distorting them, these volumes would be within the grasp of all. This is exactly what the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute has accomplished. Known for its contribution to preserving and propagating Indian heritage, this institute has published a revised edition of these books which have been out of print for more than five decades.

First published in 1937, these pocket-size volumes are the fruits of the labour of love of Pandit A M Srinivasachariar, who has made an extraordinary selection of verses from the original texts. These have been translated by Dr V Raghavan, a great scholar in his own right. With incisive forewords by Sir P S Sivaswami Aiyer and Dr S Radhakrishnan, these handy volumes keep intact the schema of the original works and succeed in bringing out their crux. Furnished with indices of proper names at the end, these books will prove to be a ready reference and a source of inspiration for venturing into the study of the originals.

Swami Narasimhananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



## Golden Jubilee

**Nippon Vedanta Kyokai**—Vedanta Society of Japan—celebrated phases two and three of its golden jubilee on 26 and 27 September 2009 and 24 January 2010 respectively. In phase two the centre organized an exhibition on 'Indo-Japanese Relationship' focusing on the bond of love, friendship, and co-operation between the two nations. The exhibition featured the pioneers of this relationship, Okakura Tenshin and Swami Vivekananda. Statistical data on various aspects of Indo-Japanese relations were presented along with publications in Japanese on India and Indians, highlighted with paintings, photos, and copies of original documents captioned in English and Japanese. The event was sponsored by the Indian embassy and inaugurated by Sri H K Singh, ambassador of India, during the Namaste India Festival held at Tokyo's Yoyogi Park Event Square.

In phase three the centre held a meeting at the Tenshin Hall of Osaka's Chuo-ward, which was sponsored by the Consulate General of India, the Indian Chamber of Commerce-Japan, Indian Social Society of Kobe, Kobe India Club, and Kansai Japan-India Social Society of Osaka. The chief guest speaker at the event was Sri Vikas Swarup, Consul General of India, Osaka. A cultural programme comprising classical Indian dance and a sitar performance was also presented. The event was attended by nearly 500 guests; the 280 seat venue was filled to capacity with overflows sitting in the aisles or watching the three monitors set up in the lobby and other areas. Supplies of the book *Swami Vivekananda and Japan*, both Japanese and English versions, along with the booklet *Inspirational Messages* were completely exhausted.



Swami Medhasananda, President, Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, presenting a memento to Mr Owasa, Secretary, Kansai Organizing Committee





## Purna Kumbha Mela

On the occasion of Purna Kumbha Mela, **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal**, made arrangements for the stay of monks and devotees for the three important baths—on 12 February (Shiva Ratri), 15 March (Somavati Amavasya), and 14 April (Vaishakhi). A big camp was put up at the ashrama premises from 10 to 16 April for the Pramukh Shahi Snan, the most important bath, on 14 April. In all, nearly 2,500 devotees and more than 400 monks were accommodated. Discourses and cultural programmes were organized and a commemorative volume was released on 12 April.

## News from Branch Centres

Sri Mukul Mudgal, chief justice of Punjab and Haryana high courts, and Sri Shivraj Patil, governor of Punjab, visited **Ramakrishna Misson Ashrama, Chandigarh**, on 2 and 4 April respectively in connection with the annual celebrations of the ashrama.

Sri M O H Farook, governor of Jharkhand, inaugurated the first floor of the Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra building, which houses classrooms and a conference hall, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi**, on 14 April.

A building with three residential rooms for monks and one room as office was inaugurated at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, on 26 April.

## Relief

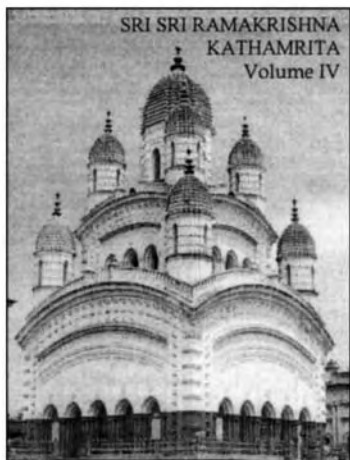
**Cyclone Aila Relief** • Belgharia centre sunk six tube wells in Aila-affected areas of Gosaba block, South 24-Parganas district.

**Storm Relief** • In the wake of a recent heavy storm which caused massive devastation in parts of Assam, Bihar, and West Bengal, two centres conducted relief operations in affected areas during April. **Silchar** centre distributed 522 saris, 71 dhotis, 62 steel plates, 1,089 CGI sheets, 120 CGI *tulis*, and 61 kg GI wires to 593 storm-affected families of 2 villages in Tapang block, Cachar district. **Katihar** centre provided 27,485 plates of cooked food, 4,900 kg rice, 3,500 kg flour, 1,400 kg dal, 700 kg sugar, 700 kg mustard oil, 700 kg chhatu, 424 kg biscuits, 150 kg jalebi, 2,296 saris, 1,512 dhotis, and 700 lungis to 1,805 storm-affected families of 45 villages in Araria and Katihar districts of Bihar, and Raiganj area in Uttar Dinajpur district, West Bengal.

**Distress Relief** • In the month of April the following centres distributed various items to the needy. **Almora**: 11,755 kg rice; **Cherrapunji**: 143 assorted garments, 275 sets of children's garments, and 373 woollen sweaters; **Guwahati**: 6 *tatsals* (weaving equipment), 3 sewing machines, and 132 books.

**Fire Relief** • On 16 April **Puri Mission** centre provided 26 sets of utensils (each set containing 1 cooking pot, 1 *dekchi*, 1 *khunti*, 1 serving spoon, 2 plates, 2 glasses, 3 bowls, 1 pitcher, and 1 bucket), 46 saris, 48 dhotis, 58 other garments, 96 towels, 26 bed sheets, 26 mosquito nets, and 26 plastic mats to 26 families whose houses had been ravaged by a devastating fire at Rachhipur village of Danagadi block in Jajpur district.





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